The life-stories of young adult men in the criminal justice system: A critical narrative analysis.

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Abstract

Over the past 10 years, 18-25 year olds in the criminal justice system (CJS) have become a specific focal point for policy and practice. This has given rise to a new criminal demographic, that of the young adult offender (YAO), replete with its discourse of age-related 'needs'. Subsequently, a range of YAO services have emerged, each focussed on meeting those particular needs. The question is, though there are clear institutional understandings of what it means to be a young adult in the CJS, do these align with what YAO say about themselves? And if not, what might YAO services, and by extension YAO focussed policy, learn from this? This aim of this thesis was to explore exactly that.

Using a narrative approach, the life-stories of 10 young adult men in the CJS (aged 19-24) were explored. They were considered in terms of the particular stories told, the construction of identity, and how the narrative itself was shaped by the social world from which it was drawn. Importantly, and in line with the tradition of *narrative criminology,* consideration was given to how to these young men indicated future action through those narratives.

Findings showed significant investment in certain pro-social identities (e.g. law-abiding citizen, reformed character, moral individual), with indicators of future action observable through the (often desistance focussed) strategies for maintaining those identities. Interestingly though, even for those most invested in moving along desistance pathways, certain courses of criminal action were suggested to be likely if it fit within their *habitus* to do so. For example, in times when moral or ethical situations demanded particular, socially sanctioned responses.

Finally, from a policy point of view, the young men rejected a number of institutional understandings of them. For example, having a lack of maturity, being poor decision-makers, and having impulsivity and emotion management problems. Instead, the young men portrayed themselves as emotionally intelligent, rational and measured. The implications are discussed.

Contents

Declaration

Whilst registered as a candidate for the above degree, I have not been registered for any other research award. The results and conclusions embodied in this thesis are the work of the named candidate and have not been submitted for any other academic award.

Word count: 81,987

List of figures

Abbreviations

BAME - Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic

BNIM - Biographical Narrative Interpretative Method

CJS - Criminal Justice System

EA - Emerging Adulthood

FANI - Free Association Narrative Interviewing

NC - Narrative Criminology

YA - Young Adults

YAO(s) - Young Adult Offender(s)

YOT - Youth Offending Team

YJB - Youth Justice Board

Dedication

To my gorgeous Mellis and my beautiful Juno, both of whom gave up so much of me, so I could give everything to this.

Acknowledgements

There are many people to acknowledge who have helped me get to this point. Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisors — Francis, who supported me after my first change in supervision, Adrian, who took me on when this thesis was looking wobbly at best, providing a much needed critical eye, and Karl, who generously gave up his time to advise on key methodological issues. Particular gratitude is due to my original supervisor, Amanda, who introduced me to critical approaches, offered invaluable advice from afar, and has always believed in my ability to do this. And finally, eternal thanks to Paul. You said to me once if I ever needed help, just to ask. I did, and you did. I don't say it lightly, friend, I am not sure if I would have passed the final hurdles without you there.

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Dissemination

British Society of Criminology Conference, July 2012 - ‘Breaking down barriers: Using the unstructured interview and free association drawing to maximise the ‘offender’ research interview’.

University of Portsmouth, Student Conference, January 2013 - ‘Colours, shapes and stick-men: Using innovative research methods to interview offenders’.

University of Portsmouth, HUMSS faculty conference, May 2016 - ‘Understanding motivation, making sense of experiences: A psychosocial exploration of the lives of young men in the criminal justice system’.

2nd Annual Conference of the Association for Psychosocial Studies, June 2016 - ‘Encounters: A psychosocial exploration of the lives of young men in the criminal justice system’.

University of Portsmouth, HUMSS faculty conference, October 2017 - Hanging Up Your Professional Hat and Putting On Your Academic One: The importance of critical distance in conducting research as a (FORMER) professional in the field

Introduction

> *People under probation supervision are not representative of the general population. I set out their general characteristics, as I think it important to recognise that many are arguably disadvantaged on almost every index of need. Many have had an unfair start in life. They were not loved or nurtured by their parents. I estimate that one in two will have been abused as a child, with about one in four taken into care….Many have no qualifications. A disproportionate number have special education needs or were expelled from school. A worrying number have become serious drug users or dependent on alcohol, or both, and many suffer with anxiety, depression other mental health conditions. Probation professionals are working with some of the most troubled and sometimes troublesome individuals in society, to reduce their reoffending and to protect the public from harm. This is not straightforward, but there is an evidence base to help guide the work.*
>
> (HMIP, 2019, p.6)

> *…contemporary probation practice is dominated by a discourse of 'risk' and 'needs'. Probation clients are thought to have an endless range of social, psychological and moral deficits that need to be 'assessed' and hopefully 'treated' or at least 'targeted' (and then re-assessed) by professionals. Although this may be a perfectly legitimate model of effective practice, caution is needed about the messages being conveyed in this sort of work. When the probation relationship is reduced to one of targeting risks and needs, these deficits may become a reified and internalized aspect of the probation client's self-identity.*
>
> (Maruna, Porter & Carvalho, 2004, p.228)

These two quotes, the first from Dame Glenys Stacey (former Chief Inspector of Probation), and the second from Shadd Maruna and colleagues (Maruna, in particular, known best for his lifetime of work in desistance and offender reintegration), usefully set the stage for this thesis. Though Maruna, Porter & Carvalho's contention is now 15 years-old, it is as relevant in 2019 as it was back in 2004. As the Chief Inspector's comments show in this most recent report on the state of the probation sector, the belief in offenders as an aberrant group, marked out by a host of social and psychological problems, and subsequently in need of a range of targeted interventions, is as widely accepted within criminal justice discourse as the belief in the very system set up to judge, organise and regulate them.

Age-conscious criminal justice

The needful offender narrative has seen particular attention when it comes to age. Over the past three decades, young offenders, i.e. those aged 10-17 years old, have been the focus of numerous policy initiatives. It has long been argued that this group are extremely susceptible to the detrimental effects of the criminal justice system (CJS) (Great Britain. Ministry of Justice, 2014; Gyateng, Moretti, May and Turnbull, 2013; Ministry of Justice, 2013a; The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, 2016). As such, they often struggle to navigate their way through it, and subsequently towards positive, pro-social futures. To address this, a range of services and systems have been set up, including the implementation of youth justice board (YJB) in 1998, all with the aim of better supporting young offenders in ways that forefronts their 'age-related vulnerabilities'.

In the past ten years, this age focus has taken a new turn. Underpinned by an evidence base which has argued that reaching one's 18th birthday does not automatically transfer a child into a socially and intellectually competent adult (Arnett, 2000, 2004, Barrow Cadbury Trust, 2012; Bosick & Gover, 2010; Catan, 2004; Côté and Bynner, 2008; T2A, 2009; Kloep and Hendry, 2010; Osgood, Foster, and Courtney, 2010) the third sector has driven forward a demand for the criminal justice system (CJS) to recognise 18-24 year-olds as a distinct and separate group (T2A, 2009; T2A 2012). The Transition to Adulthood (T2A) Alliance, (a broad coalition of 16 third sector criminal justice, health and youth organisations - t2a.org.uk), has argued continually that this group are particularly vulnerable in the adult criminal justice system, and as such, should be treated in ways that understand and respond to their age-specific needs. This demand has accordingly played out in the development of a new criminal demographic, that of the young adult offender (YAO).

As part of the response to this perceived need, a number of YAO services and systems have been set up. For example, the T2A Alliance implemented three YAO pilot projects in 2011, and several 'demonstration projects' in 2014. Each were focussed on providing targeted initiatives to support young adults in the CJS, and addressing the underlying causes of crime (t2a.org.uk/work-in-progress/demonstration-projects). And in terms of national attention, the YAO agenda has now infiltrated at government level. Over the past six years, young adults have taken their place as an independent group of interest within criminal justice policy. In 2012, maturity assessments were added for the first time to the

guidance for assessing culpability in the Code of Conduct for Crown Prosecutors. And in the past three years, there have been two House of Commons Justice Committee reports (2016; 2018) expressly focussed on recommending changes in criminal justice policy so as to recognise and respond to the particular needs of this group.

Help or hindrance?

Though at the helm of all this has been a commitment to improve the experiences of 18-24 year olds as they travel through the system, this drive to institutionalising young adulthood within criminal justice policy and practice also raises important questions. Firstly, how do these staunchly held beliefs about the nature and needs of YAOs impact on the young adults (YA) themselves? As the Maruna, Porter & Carvalho quote at the opening of this introduction importantly notes, when work with offenders is reduced to targeting risks and needs, is there potential for these "deficits" to be absorbed into an individuals' sense of self? Moreover, (and as will be explored later in this thesis), might there be an even greater risk of engendering feelings of marginalisation and alienation from such help and support? And secondly, are there particular ways in which these YA construct their *own* YAO identities? Significantly, are there ways which might improve or enhance how services work with them? Indeed, by understanding how this group explains their own lives, might we argue that we are in a better position to offer a more useful and meaningful package of support?

Involving a young adult perspective

Criminal justice, along with a range of other community institutions and systems, advocate for the involvement of the 'user-voice' in shaping and developing services. Just this month[1], HM Inspectorate of Probation (2019) released a report lauding the benefits of this. However, involving the voices of (often marginalised) others can be a tricky terrain. Too often, these voices become subsumed into wider agendas, often caught up with having to find proof of value for money (Hedley et al., 2010). The task is in finding the right approach.

[1] Referring to September 2019

One of the ways in which the voices of others has been usefully captured is by using narrative based research methods. Narratives, in their focus on the life-stories of others, as *told* by those others, arguably encourages more ownership and empowerment for the speaker than, for example, thematically organised interviews (dependent on the researcher's point of view, of course). Whatever the view on the empowering nature of narrative though, there is consensus that as an analytic approach, it is highly pluralistic. Amongst the most commonly known are Vladimir Propp's (1968) 31-part structure to the Russian fairy tale, William Labov's (1972) narrative structure theory, Polkinghorne's (1988) narrative knowing, Mishler's (1991; 1995) models of narrative analysis, and Connelly and Clandinin's (1990), narrative inquiry. However, though these classic approaches to narrative analysis offer much in terms of understanding the structure and nature of the text, none consider the important role that narratives have in stating intention to action. This is an important omission. Through our talk, we lay the foundations for how we want to be and how we intend to behave. For example, the alcoholic telling his story of abstinence is as much a story about what has happened in his life as it is one about what he intends to happen in future.

In 2009, Lois Presser introduced the term, *narrative criminology*, to describe a theoretical and methodological approach which aimed to do just that. Narrative criminology (NC) has at its heart an interest in understanding how what people say translates in to what people do. Its attractors utilise the approach to consider how narrative is used to signpost the listener towards the speaker's investment in particular courses of action. Methodologically, the approach draws on the social-constructionist position in its contention that what people say is shaped by the social world. For example, it considers the impact of institutions, cultures and societal beliefs in their power to shape how we think about, and therefore how we narrate the world. It also is interested in the effects of the social in terms of its impact on the very circumstances of the narrative's production (i.e. the time, place and space of its creation). This is an acutely important perspective if we are to understand the investments individuals make in telling certain stories in certain ways.

Narrative criminology, in its interest in making causal claims, offers a perspective that other narrative approaches do not. Regarding the topic of this thesis then, it allows a consideration of not only how YAO might explain and make sense of their lives, and the social conditions that brought them to those explanations, but how those narrated lives

might suggest intention to future action. Indeed, from an applied perspective, for any service or system that has reducing criminality as their goal, an understanding of individual investments in certain ways of being and doing is absolutely crucial.

The aims of this thesis are therefore as follows:

Aims

1. To explore the narratives of young adult men[2] in the criminal justice system, understanding their construction as a product of the social world in which they have been drawn from

2. To consider how these narratives lay the foundations for the young men's intended future actions

Research Questions

1. What narratives, and narrative identities, do young adult men in the criminal justice system draw on to explain and make sense of their lives?

2. How are these narratives shaped by the social world from which they have been drawn?

3. How is future action suggested through these narratives?

4. What learning is available for policy and practice? How can the understanding drawn from this research be used by criminal justice agencies responding to and working with this group?

[2] An explanation as to why the focus of this thesis is specifically on young adult men rather than all young adult offenders is found in chapter 3.

The structure of this thesis

Chapter 1 - The opening chapter charts the rise of the young adult offender (YAO), from a concept prototype of the voluntary sector, to a newly reified criminal demographic within criminal justice policy. Beginning with an examination of the ways in which rehabilitation strategy has constructed the discourse of 'offender needs', the chapter documents the institutionalisation of young adulthood, first within sociological and psychological discourse, and later within criminal justice policy and practice. As part of this, the decade long work of the Transition to Adulthood (T2A) Alliance is discussed. A critical view is then taken, as the chapter turns its attention to considering the implications of this institutionalisation, both for YAOs *and* for the services set up to support them. The chapter finishes with an exploration into how young adults have contributed to their own reification within criminal justice policy, with a critique of 'user voice' focussed research.

Chapter 2 - This second chapter is concerned with interrogating narrative theory. In doing so, it considers what value a narratological perspective might have in exploring the topic. It begins with a brief account of the role of narratives in explaining and making sense of people's lives, progressing on to a more detailed account of how narrative has been used within the discipline of criminology. Within this, the problem of pursuing narrative truth is discussed, thinking particularly of criminology's location within the wider field of criminal justice — a field that claims truth and facticity as its most basic tenet. The relatively new discipline of narrative criminology is then introduced, along with an account of similar approaches in other related fields. Through this, important issues of methodology and epistemology are discussed. The chapter concludes with an account of the aims of this thesis in its intention to explore the narrated worlds of young adult offenders from a phenomenologically informed, yet commensurately critical perspective.

Chapter 3 - The third chapter sets out the methodological approach used in exploring the topic of this thesis. The chapter begins by explaining the demographics of the sample, moving on to a full account of the recruitment process. Two in-depth qualitative research methods are then discussed — the biographic narrative interview and graphic elicitation — explaining how each was drawn on and adapted to fit the aims of the thesis. The limitations of these methods are also discussed to provide context for the subsequent

analysis chapters. The chapter concludes with an account of a three-stage analytical approach, faithful to the principles of narrative criminology.

Chapter 4 - In preparation for the main analysis taking place in chapters 5 and 6, this fourth chapter briefly explores the role that detailed pen portraits can have in producing a coherent analysis. Subsequently, the pen portraits of the 10 young men who took part in this research are presented, along with the drawings they did as part of the data collection process.

Chapter 5 - The first of two analysis chapters, chapter 5 considers the core themes that the young men drew on in explaining and making sense of their lives. Attention is given to the ways in which the social world has imprinted itself on the lives and therefore narrated realities of the young men. The topics explored include, masculinities and the construction of gender; money, consumerism and status; friendships, maturity and desistance, blame, shame and the navigation of bad feelings, and finally the young men's constructions of, and beliefs about, the systems and services that have impacted on their lives.

Chapter 6 - In this second analysis chapter, a reflexive stance is taken. This chapter explores the young men's narratives as a function and consequence of the social world in which they were produced. The topics explored in this chapter include, the argument for a reflexive perspective; the role of the interview setting in establishing power; issues with the drawing task; the challenges of digitally recording interviews with offenders; investments in preserving 'good' selves; and masculinities in the interview context. The chapter concludes with an account of intersectionality as a lens with which to understand the interview process, and a consideration of this in light of a particular interviewee.

Chapter 7 - The final chapter considers the implications from the analysis, both in its contribution to the field of narrative criminology, and in what it might provide by way of learning for YAO services, and by extension YAO focused policy and practice. This chapter begins by revisiting the research problem set out in chapter 1, and subsequently the aims and objectives of this research. It then moves on to summarise the key themes from the analysis conducted in chapters 4 and 5, highlighting the most significant points and how they relate to the aims of this thesis. The chapter then progresses on to set out how the study's findings might be useful to the existing knowledge base when it comes to the

construction of YAO in criminal justice policy and practice. This chapter, and the thesis, is then concluded by considering where this research might be taken in future.

Chapter 1: The institutionalisation of young adulthood within the criminal justice system

The following chapter charts the rise of the 'young adult offender' from a concept prototype of the voluntary sector, to a newly reified criminal demographic within criminal justice policy. Beginning with an examination of the ways in which rehabilitation strategy has constructed the 'needful and vulnerable offender', the chapter moves on to document the institutionalisation of young adulthood, first within sociological and psychological discourse, and later within criminal justice policy and practice. As part of this, the decade long work of the Transition to Adulthood (T2A) Alliance is discussed. A critical view is then taken, as the chapter turns its attention to considering the implications of this institutionalisation, both for young adult offenders and for the services set up to support them. The chapter concludes by exploring how young adults have contributed to their own reification within criminal justice policy with a critique of 'user voice' focussed research.

1.1 The current rehabilitative response, and the discourse of 'offender needs'

The focus on offender rehabilitation has been a mainstay in British crime and justice practice since the late 19th century. Alongside the state's commitment to punish those who break the law, sits a simultaneous commitment to rehabilitate. Indeed, though offenders must be made accountable, they must equally be afforded the opportunity to change.

Within rehabilitation policy, change is understood to be achieved in a number of ways. This might be through enrolling the offender in programmes and interventions which address their problematic thinking and behaviour (e.g. anger management programmes such as Resolve, domestic violence programmes such as Building Better Relationships, and cognitive change interventions such as the Thinking Skills Programme — https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/832658/descriptions-accredited-programmes.pdf). It might be through linking them up

with services and agencies which focus on their crimogenic issues (e.g. substance misuse organisations, homelessness charities or education, training and employment opportunities). Or more broadly, it might be through (re)connecting them with people and places which will assist in their navigation towards prosocial thinking and prosocial behaviour. Or, as Travis Hirshi's (1969) social bond theory would explain it, through strengthening the attachments to social life including the attachment to family, the commitment to social norms and institutions, and the involvement in activities. And, most importantly, a belief that these things are important (p.16).

Firmly underpinning this rehabilitation philosophy is the opinion that offenders are a group 'in need'. And it is in this position where this thesis is most interested. The first part of this chapter therefore, will explore how this needful population has been constructed in Government policy.

1.1.1 Rehabilitation in Government policy

The past ten years have seen a wealth of governmental reports addressing plans for an effective rehabilitation strategy. This focus has been heightened since the transformation of the Probation Service in 2014 (Great Britain. Ministry of Justice, 2013c), and the subsequent implementation of Community Rehabilitation Companies. Though the onus of these reports is often directed towards penal populism with its focus on crime reduction and 'reducing costs to the British taxpayer', the underlying message is that rehabilitation is best achieved through a targeted approach which addresses any and all factors statistically linked to recidivism. Indeed, the risk-needs-responsivity (RNR) model of rehabilitation has been *the* model in determining the treatment of offenders since the early 90s.

The conversation surrounding understanding and meeting 'offender needs' has, over the years, developed in to a rather consistent set of typicalities. Policy relating to offenders positions this group as one who invariably lead chaotic lives (Barry & McIvor, 2008; Crowther, 2007; Newburn, 2007), have complex needs (Great Britain. House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, 2016; Prison Reform Trust, 2015; Step Together www.step-together.org.uk), and struggle across fundamental areas of life. Factors widely considered to be criminogenic and therefore in need of addressing include: a lack of

education and employment; poor mental health (including emotional instability); criminal/ anti-social peer relationships; substance misuse; fractured and difficult personal relationships; issues with housing and homelessness and, more broadly, impulsivity and poor thinking skills.

The 2015 Ministry of Justice policy paper, *2010 to 2015 Government Policy: Reoffending and Rehabilitation,* articulates these points directly. The report outlines a commitment to a 'payment by results model' in which it is argued effective ways of rehabilitating offenders will develop through rewarding providers delivering the most effective rehabilitation programmes. For example, through providing effective community-based punishments; meaningful and productive work and training for prisoners while in prison; preventing drug abuse inside prisons and providing drugs counselling after release; engaging drug misusing offenders as early as possible in their contact with the criminal justice system; using integrated offender management to better manage offenders; and supporting offenders to resettle in their communities after release (Great Britain. Ministry of Justice, 2015). The message regarding reducing reoffending is clear. To actively reduce reoffending and work effectively towards desistance, the broad and complex needs of the offending population must be met.

The offender needs discourse has been heavily embedded too within the practice and philosophies of the voluntary sector. Charities and organisations dedicated to working with offenders and ex-offenders (e.g. Switchback; Clinks; Catch 22; Prison Reform Trust; Nacro; UNLOCK; St Giles Trust; Step Together, and many more) have focussed their efforts on addressing the perceived root causes of offending (e.g. lack of employment, housing problems, substance misuse, mental health, etc.). In doing so, they make a case for the complex issues' offenders face (Step Together, www.step-together.org.uk); the help offenders need in overcoming [criminogenic] issues (St Giles Trust, www.stgilestrust.org.uk); and the subsequent urgency for offender needs focussed services and systems to help this group in moving on positively with their lives (Nacro, www.nacro.org.uk; UNLOCK, www.unlock.org.uk). Through this lens, offenders are constructed as dependent, vulnerable and in crucial need of targeted support.

1.2 The construction of age-related needs: Children in criminal justice policy

The identification, classification and categorisation of offender typologies has been key in criminal justice organisation since the late 1970s. Within this, increasing numbers of distinct and separate groups have been identified within the wider population of offenders, all argued as having their own set of unique and substantive needs. These distinct and separate groups have seen the inclusion of a range of different offender categories including, those with mental health needs (Anderson, Vostanis & Spencer, 2004; Ryan & Mitchell, 2011); those within the Traveller community, (Cottrell-Boyce, 2014); elderly offenders (Curtice, Parker, Wismayer, & Tomison, 2003); offenders with drug and alcohol needs (Newbury-Birch, Harrison, Brown, Kaner, 2009); women offenders (Barry & McIvor, 2008; Hollin & Palmer, 2006); Black, Asian and Minority Ethnicity offenders (May, Gyateng & Bateman, 2010; Cowburn, Lavis, & Walker, 2008) and offenders from religious (particularly Muslim) groups (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2010; T2A, 2016).

One of the most prevalent ways in which policy and research has distinguished within the offending population has been through the identification of age groups. Most notably, of course, being young offenders i.e. those age 10-17 years old. Over the past two hundred years, the British criminal justice system has steadily increased its focus on children and young people as a separate group, and one with needs and vulnerabilities argued as demonstrably distinct from adults. From the seminal Juvenile Offenders Act in 1847, which comprised the first legislation in distinguishing between adults and children in the justice system, right up to the most recent 2015 Government document, *2010 to 2015 Government policy: Young offenders,* which spearheaded education (and relatedly, the use of secure colleges) as a core strategy for reducing reoffending amongst young people, the governmental/societal position of the relevance of age-related differences amongst the offending population has been made clear.

The ‘needs’ discourse relating to young offenders has often echoed that of their older counterparts in terms of economic instability, problematic personal relationships, poor mental health and substance misuse issues. Notably though, there has been focus on how these common issues present uniquely for the younger population. In 2014, for example, the Ministry of Justice produced *Transforming Youth Custody.* The report centred on the needs of young offenders in terms of their often disrupted early beginnings and unsettled/ chaotic family lives. The report contended that young people in custody commonly have

experienced “difficult backgrounds”, including histories of local authority care, absent parents, disrupted education and living arrangements, and in some cases self-harm (Great Britain. Ministry of Justice, 2014, p.6). The young people were also said to present with mental and physical health problems, and emotional and behavioural difficulties. These wider needs were argued as being driving factors in young people’s offending behaviour, and commensurately, acted “as a barrier to educational progress” (ibid). Of particular note, in outlining plans for an East Midlands Secure College, the report underlined differing age-related needs even *within* the wider community of young people. Older and more resilient young people, it was stated, would be accommodated in larger living units, while those who were younger and “more vulnerable” would be accommodated separately in smaller blocks (p.7). The salient point was evident. Age differences were seen to heighten vulnerability. Younger age offenders were in need of separate housing to ensure they were better protected, and by extension that their age-related needs were being better met.

Gyateng, Moretti, May and Turnbull (2013) in the Ministry of Justice commissioned report, *Young People and the Secure Estate: Needs and Interventions,* also make an explicit case for the specific needs of young offenders in a study conducted in 2010. The research comprised of three core parts, 1) a survey of 1,245 young people approaching the end of a custodial sentence, 2) an analysis of available administrative records relating to the surveyed young people, and 3) 42 in-depth qualitative interviews with secure estate staff across five establishments. Drawing from their extensive research findings, the authors underline the importance of understanding young offenders as a distinct group in a number of ways. Firstly, in terms of their need for positive relationships, specifically with prison staff. Here, the findings suggested at something aligned to role modelling i.e. that young people might form trusted relationships and/or be guided in structure and time management through access to such relationships. The authors also highlighted the needs of young people in terms of education, training and employment (with eduction having a direct employment focus for older young people), behavioural issues (anger management), substance misuse (underlined in terms of age-specific substance problems i.e. tobacco, cannabis and alcohol), and the highly age-related issue of short sentences. The report indicated this last matter as a particular problem given that necessary interventions offered in the prison environment were often missed when sentences were so short. Building positive relationships with staff was felt unlikely to happen when young people moved in and out of custody so quickly.

In addition to these broader studies of age-related needs, there is also a wealth of research centred on young offenders' more *specific* age-related needs. For example, their particular mental health issues and substance dependencies (Chitsabesan et al., 2006; Marshall, Theodosiou, Kirby & Ark, 2011; Ryan & Mitchell, 2011), their age-relevant educational needs (Great Britain. Ministry of Justice, 2013a; The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, 2016); their physical health (Douglas & Plugge, 2008; Russell, White, Landes, 2006); and their housing/accommodation requirements (Stone, 2008; Thomas, 2013). Of particular interest is the 2014, *Early Lights out for Young Offenders* proposal put forward by the then Minister for Justice, The Rt Hon Chris Grayling. The proposal set out guidelines for young people in custody in terms of restrictions to be placed on their late night 'free' activities. It was suggested that young offenders should be in their cells with lights out by 10.30pm, so as to create more routine and structure to their lives, and discourage staying up all night watching TV. Under this "boarding school" style policy (Wright, 2014, June 28), it was contended that young people would receive the discipline "badly needed to help turn their lives around". The impact of this is noteworthy, both for its disciplinary and authoritarian tone, but also in its underlining of how treatment in custody should have a clear age-related focus. The proposal very directly placed young offenders as a group in need of strong parental discipline, and a strict and structured home-like environment.

However, though the discourse of young offender needs, specifically within criminal justice agencies, has seen a long and established history, this is where the age-distinction has (until relatively recently) seen a rather abrupt end. There has been a prevalent, though unarticulated, assumption that when a young person reaches their 18th birthday, their age-specific needs will accordingly reflect that of the adult offending population. The structure of the CJS in directing 18 and overs into the adult estate has bore testimony to this. However, more recently the focus on an age-specific criminal justice approach for another age-group has seen significant traction. Indeed, over the past 20 years or so, research, practice and latterly policy has seen attention paid to a new developmental group - that of the 18-25 year olds. And it is here, that the attention of this chapter now turns.

1.3 The emergence of young adulthood

The understanding of young adults (YA) as a distinct and substantive group has seen increasing levels of attention over the past twenty years. Used as a term to describe those in their late teens and early to mid-twenties, 'young adulthood' has now firmly embedded itself into the sociological and psychological conscious. A brief search on Sociology database *SocIndex*[3] confirms this with 546 articles with 'young adulthood' in the title and 2,869 with 'young adults'. This result is magnified when searching amongst the Psychology databases. PyschINFO, for example, yields 1,241 articles focussed exclusively on young adulthood and 10,086 on young adults. Notably, and reflecting how relatively recent the interest in this group has been, over 90% of these publications are from 2000 onwards.

One of the most prominent researchers in the field, American researcher, Jeffrey Arnett (2000, 2004), has written extensively about this group over the last twenty years. He refers to them (or rather the period) as 'emerging adulthood' (EA). Drawing on the argument that young people today are delaying adulthood through longer periods in education, marrying and becoming parents later and remaining financially dependent on family much longer, Arnett argues that EA constitutes an *additional* developmental stage that reflects societal change in industrialised countries. He explains it as time in which late teens and twenties engage in self-focussed exploration as a means of constructing their later 'adult' identities (Arnett, 2000).

However, Arnett's conceptualisation of young adulthood has been criticised for its rather middle-class exclusivity. Côté and Bynner (2008), question the usefulness of a model which is only applicable to a certain proportion of the population. They argue that the process of self-focussed exploration described by Arnett is a recourse only available to certain, more privileged groups. Instead, the authors advocate a more contextual model that maps 'pathways to adulthood'. As Côté and Bynner (2008) highlight, one of the difficulties of presenting a defined model of young adulthood is in accounting for individual differences. Though statistics spanning the past 40 years show that *generally* people are staying in education for longer, marrying and becoming parents later and delaying entry to the labour market etc. (ONS, 2012), there is also a number who become parents much

[3] Searches made in September 2019

younger, leave education earlier and enter employment much sooner (Devitt, Knighton and Lowe, 2009). More broadly, other researchers have questioned the value of creating a new developmental stage purely to reflect structural changes in matters such as employment and education (Bynner 2005; Côté and Bynner, 2008; Kloep and Hendry, 2010). Young adulthood, or the period of time termed by Arnett as emerging adulthood, is conceptualised as more of a *process* rather than a defined developmental stage. For a growing number of researchers, young adulthood is thought of as the product of an extended adolescence and a delayed entry to adulthood. As such, many prefer the phrase 'transition to adulthood' (Barrow Cadbury Trust, 2012; Bosick & Gover, 2010; Catan, 2004; Côté and Bynner, 2008; T2A, 2009; Kloep and Hendry, 2010; Osgood, Foster, and Courtney, 2010; Shanahan, 2000).

The 'transition to adulthood' has since become something of a buzz phrase, and in particular in debates centred around young people who experience more complex routes to developmental and social maturity. This issue was advanced in a 2005 report produced by the former Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), *Transitions: Young adults with Complex Needs.* The report examined specific problems faced by 16-24 year olds as they made the transition from adolescence to adulthood. It concluded that the transition was made substantially more difficult if an individual was dealing with one or more issues including poor housing or homelessness, substance misuse, poor health or mental health, low education or long-term unemployment (SEU, 2005). It was argued that better resourced and well-supported young people experience *desirable* "slow-track" transitions to adulthood – e.g. extended periods in education, leaving the family home later. Whilst those facing social and economic disadvantage typically experience *undesirable* "fast-track" transitions – leaving home earlier, leaving education before 16. The report concluded that those experiencing a fast-track to adulthood ran an increased likelihood of becoming involved with crime. And it was through this report that the foundations for a new criminal demographic was formulated - that of the 'young adult offender' (YAO).

1.3.1 The entrenchment of young adult offenders within voluntary sector discourse

Though in part introduced through the SEU report, the notion of the YAO has been almost exclusively driven forward through the voluntary sector, in particular through the dedicated work of the charitable foundation, the Barrow Cadbury Trust. It was the charity itself that

first brought this particular agenda to the UK through their establishment of the independent Commission on Young Adults and the Criminal Justice System. The role of the Commission was, they stated:

> *…to develop a way in which the criminal justice system can recognise the importance of the transition between adolescence and adulthood, to develop ideas about how the system can promote natural desistance from offending in young n adults in transition, and to find a way in which the criminal justice system could better promote the life chances of young adults.*
>
> (Barrow Cadbury Trust, 2005, p.4)

Heavily influenced by the conclusions drawn by the SEU, the Barrow Cadbury Trust produced, *Lost in Transition* (2005). In this follow up report, it was maintained that that the current CJS was failing young people in their late teens and early 20s. A number of key recommendations were made to deal with 'the problem', including, placing Transition to Adulthood Teams (T2A Teams) into every criminal justice area; taking developmental maturity into consideration during sentencing; and developing policy and practice to focus on issues argued as particularly problematic for the YA group e.g. education and employment, health and social care, mental health and housing. Also emphasised was the importance of devoting special attention to the needs and circumstances of young black and minority ethnic adults (BCT, 2005, p.62). The report concluded its recommendations by arguing that measurements of success must move away from a sole focus on reducing reoffending, and instead prioritise improvements in life chances and life skills (BCT, 2005, p.63).

The YAO agenda was further solidified with the subsequent creation of the Transition to Adulthood (T2A) Alliance. Initiated in 2008, the Alliance (a broad coalition of 16 criminal justice, health and youth organisations - t2a.org.uk) sought to promote a "distinct and radically different approach" to dealing with YA in the criminal justice system (T2A, 2009; T2A, 2012). The Alliance's inaugural report, *A New Start: Young Adults in the Criminal Justice System* (T2A, 2009), called for mainstream responsibility in preventing 16-24 year olds from ending up in the CJS (p.14). It claimed that the system failed to account for developmental differences between younger adults and older adults, and largely ignored this group's "specific needs" (Nicholas, Prasad, Collins, Shelupanov & Devitt, 2010; T2A, 2010). Though it was acknowledged there were certain structures in place that *technically* recognised young adulthood (e.g. Young Offender Institutions), they were both limited –

only for young adults up to the age of 20, and limiting – the focus being solely on punishment and reparation. YAO's wider developmental needs were stated as being largely unmet (Howard League for Penal Reform, 2010a, 2010b). The report subsequently stipulated that policy and practice should respond to YAOs in ways that took their age, gender, ethnicity and background in to account (T2A, 2009).

The specific needs discourse was (and continues to be) fundamental to the Alliance's argument as to why YAO should be treated differently from older adult offenders. Constructing *all* YA as a distinct and separate group was therefore crucial in their early publications. To address this, *A New Start* made a number of key observations about the uniqueness of the 16-24 year old population. Firstly, it spoke of changes in economic stability amongst this group. Drawing on longitudinal population statistics, the report contended that due to changes in the labour market and increased expectations of entry to higher education, YA were financially dependent on parents and guardians for much longer (compared with YA in previous generations), and were said to be living in a state of subsidised independence (p.11), no longer economically self-governing. Secondly, it was argued that YA were at risk of being "adversely shaped" by their environment due to their susceptibility of positive and negative external influences (T2A, 2009, p.11). This was posited to be particularly problematic for YA in the CJS due to the likelihood of them mixing with potentially dangerous and manipulative older adults whilst in prison. Thirdly, a cognitive/developmental argument was put forward. Brain functioning was claimed to be still developing in the mid-to-late 20s, and thus areas of reasoning and judgement were easily affected (T2A, 2009, p.12). And fourthly, it was said that YA experienced low levels of trust and belonging, which in turn affected their wellbeing. This, the report argued, was particularly pronounced for disadvantaged YA (e.g. those growing up in poverty, deprivation and with low social mobility), who were said to be "shut out from society and cut off from the normal routes to adulthood" (T2A, 2009, p.12).

The report also made specific points just about the YAO population. For example, it discussed their poor mental health i.e. personality disorders, psychosis, neurotic disorders, substance misuse, and their higher rates of self-harm and suicide compared with older prisoners. In terms of the background, YAOs were argued as being more likely than older offenders to have been in the care system, more likely to have experienced unemployment, and more likely to struggle with literacy. Finally, and here in relation to just young *male* offenders, the report stated that this group were more prone to alcohol abuse

than both older and younger offenders. At least a quarter were fathers, who had little or no contact with their children. And regarding their own victimhood, were more likely than any other group to have experienced violent crime (T2A, 2009). The report concluded with 12 focussed recommendations including, diverting young people away from the CJS, taking individual characteristics into consideration during sentencing (i.e. maturity), better support during transition from the child to adult estate, the extension of YOIs to include 24 year olds, employment changes, support similar to that of young people leaving care, better and more prolific use of community sentences (to avoid custody), and a more tailored, age-specific approach to dealing with substance misuse.

In the month following the publication of *A New Start*, the 'age-specific needs' agenda was explored again in *Universities of Crime: Young Adults, the Criminal Justice System and Social Policy* (Chater, 2009). Key concerns were raised around sociological issues such as poverty and social exclusion, family breakdown and education and welfare needs. The reported suggested that these issues were significantly more acute for YAOs than they were for older offenders. Unlike under 18s, who were routinely recognised in law, policy and practice, it was stated that there had been virtually no specific measures to deal with the problems experienced by those in their late teens and early twenties (Chater, 2009, p. 3). 21-24 year olds, it was said, were "simply held" within the full adult estate, without any offer of protection or support. The report further maintained that even 18-21 year olds who had access to some age-related services, were only offered limited programmes specifically tailored to their needs (Chater, 2009, p.21). The report subsequently concluded that YAOs were a neglected, under-funded and largely ignored group in the CJS. In addition, the report was particularly scathing of the CJS's treatment of 18-24 year olds compared with other public services (e.g. the care system, and drug and alcohol services). Whereas similar age care-leavers and those with drug and alcohol problems were said to receive support which recognised and responded to them in an age-specific way, the CJS, remained "vastly out of step" with international norms and experience. This was particularly the case with regard to the type and nature of detention facilities (Chater, 2009, p.3).

In 2012, the T2A Alliance made another targeted move towards changing policy and practice relating to young adults in the CJS with the release of *Pathways from Crime*. The report introduced the 'T2A Pathway' encompassing 10 points in the criminal justice process where a more rigorous and effective approach might be delivered with regard to

YAO (T2A, 2012, p.4). Each of the points highlighted the specific ways in which YAO should be dealt with by criminal justice agencies. The points and recommendations were as follows:

1. Policing and arrest - specialised training in managing contact with young adults, (particularly in relation to stop and search); diverting young adults into appropriate services and away from the criminal justice process.
2. Diversion - drug, alcohol and mental health services to support young adults in the criminal justice process; better management of the transition between child and adult services (an in partnership with the police).
3. Restorative Justice - a consideration at all stages of the criminal justice process
4. Prosecution - considering the importance of maturity
5. Sentencing - again, considering the importance of maturity, and diverting where appropriate
6. Community Sentences - model young adult specific community interventions; tailor other available community sentence options to the specific needs of young adults.
7. Managing the transfer process - recognising transition to adulthood is a process and not a 'moment in time' (T2A, 2012, p8), and therefore transfer between Youth Offending Service and adult probation is crucial
8. Custody - keep nonviolent young adults out of custody, enable the courts to issue an intensive community sentence; specific attention should be given to young adult women, who have gender related specific needs, and black and ethnic minority young adult prisoners who are consistently over represented in custody statistics.
9. Resettlement - resettlement plans in place for every young adult at least three months prior to their release; the provision of a through the gate' service.
10. Enabling desistance from crime - the provision of a 'young adult specific approach', focus on securing stable accommodation and long-term employment to help young adults stop offending.

Since the *Pathways* report, the T2A Alliance have produced 41 further reports and studies (https://www.t2a.org.uk/t2a-evidence/research-reports/)[4] exploring YA in the CJS. These have largely focussed on some of the more specific points to emerge from the earlier reports, including the use of restorative justice, the links between brain injury and

[4] As of September 2019

offending, and the role of maturity in prosecution and sentencing. The reports have also seen particular attention paid to certain young adult offender groups, such as young adult women, and young adult Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) young men. As a compendium, these reports have all sat together to cement the existence of the young adult offender, whilst simultaneously demanding a response from the criminal justice system itself.

1.3.2 The 'young adult offender' in criminal justice policy

The institutionalisation of the YAO has taken a considerably longer time to manifest within criminal justice policy. Despite maturity assessments being added to the guidance for assessing culpability in the Code of Conduct for Crown Prosecutors in 2012, it is only really over the past five years that the Government has placed any dedicated focus on this group, and only in the last four that YAO *needs* have been the sole agenda. Following directly from the work of the T2A Alliance however, criminal justice policies now recognise YAOs as a substantive group, and one with their own distinct identity.

In 2013, the Ministry of Justice produced *Transforming Management of Young Adults in Custody.* The report was the first of its kind, and certainly within the realm of Government policy, that specifically articulated the young adult agenda, albeit through a lens of advocating for the implementation of dual-designated institutions (DDIs). Though the term 'young adult' had been in common use in custody statistics for decades prior to the publication of this report, it was principally used in an actuarial manner i.e. to show a statutory distinction between YAO (those aged 18-20) and older adult offenders (those aged 21 or over) (Great Britain. Ministry of Justice, 2013b, p.4). In most cases, the young adult category was used solely to illustrate the age-composition in YOIs. *Transforming Management of Young Adults in Custody* placed YAOs for the first time in criminal justice policy as a distinct group, and drew on the discourse of specific, age-related needs to support their position. In the report, it was articulated that the current age-specific institutions were not working for this "age in-between" group. The report addressed concerns about the effectiveness of the current system, arguing that age-specific institutions were unable to "target resources appropriately" (Great Britain. Ministry of Justice, 2013b, p.4). The benefits of DDIs were highlighted through the suggestion that the falling numbers of YA in custody meant that using only single, age-specific institutions

significantly limited the locations to which YA could be sent. A wider choice of institutions, the report argued, would enable YA to be located closer to home, have a wider choice of, and better access to, age-specific programmes and interventions, and for young adult males, would reduce the need to transfer them to adult prisons upon reaching their 21st birthday. The report also contended that prison governors' experience suggested that DDIs were "less volatile and more stable" than dedicated YOIs, implying a greater level of mental health and physical safety.

By 2015, the tone of the response to young adults in the CJS had changed. Instead of the focus being on better management of this group, reflecting the more actuarial practices of the justice system, the YAO 'needs' agenda was thrust directly into prominence. Within this year, three major reports were produced. Each focussed on YA as a group in need of specific attention. The first comprised the Ministry of Justice report, *Needs and Characteristics of Young Adults in Custody: Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) Survey,* (Williams, 2015). The report extrapolated data from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) study, which collected information from 1,435 adult prisoners (i.e. those 18 and over) sentenced to between one month and 4 years, from 2005 to 2006. The needs of 18-20 year olds on reception in custody were compared with the data of those aged 21 years and over. Findings showed that despite *all* groups reporting high levels of need in terms of employment, education and substance misuse, age-related differences between YAOs and older offenders were highly apparent. With regards to education, training and employment, the younger group were found to be more likely than their older peers to have issues with schooling. They were more likely to report being unemployed/looking for work in the four weeks before custody, *and* to state that having a job after release would enable them to stop reoffending. In terms of housing, it was found that YAOs were less likely to need help finding a place to live when released (the young age of many of the YA group meant that more were set to return to their family home after release). And in terms of mental health and substance misuse, YAO were found less likely to be suffering from anxiety or depression, less likely to report needing help with a drug problem, and less likely to cite drug misuse as a factor in their offending behaviour. Conversely though, a large proportion of this group linked their offending behaviour with alcohol use, and stated that not drinking too much alcohol would be important in stopping them from re-offending in the future.

The implications of the study made a clear cut case for the very different needs of YAOs compared with their older contemporaries. The research underlined the importance of improving education and employability amongst the YA group. It highlighted that older adults and young adult drug users may require different types of intervention focussed on their particular patterns of substance use, and made demonstrable links between drinking, age and crime. In particular, it articulated the role of alcohol misuse in offending behaviour, and underlined the need for this to be considered in the rehabilitation of YAOs. As the authors themselves make a point of concluding:

> *…it is important to consider that young adults in custody are different from older prisoners because of their age alone, and therefore may have been less likely to experience certain life events.*
>
> (Williams, 2015, p.11).

In the same month, McGuire (2015), commissioned by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS), produced *What Works in Reducing Reoffending in Young Adults? A Rapid Evidence Assessment.* Though less focussed on the 'needs and vulnerabilities' discourse, this second report underlined the distinctness of the YAO group through its evaluation of the most effective intervention approaches for those within it. It was commented that strategies often targeted at young offenders (i.e. those aged 10-17 years old) were sometimes inappropriate for YAOs, such as the involvement of families. Yet equally, the need for structure was found to be essential given their lack of a fully formed adult identity. It was additionally shown that YAOs were more susceptible than older adult offenders to the "opinions and perceptions of peers" (McGuire, 2015, p.4). This was suggested as being important to consider when tailoring intervention approaches. What was particularly pronounced within this report though was its extension of the YAO group to include those in their early to mid-20s. Rather than the traditionally understood classification of YAO to comprise just 18-20 year olds, the importance of understanding young adulthood as a stage reaching from the late teens and well into an individual's twenties was undeniably being questioned.

Finally, and also commissioned by NOMS, was the 2015, *Better Outcomes for Young Adult Men: Evidence Based Commissioning Principles*. The report argued for key maturity differences amongst YAOs and older adult offenders, stating that YA males were more easily influenced than their older peers, they "overly relied" on other people compared to their older peers (National Offender Management Service, 2015, p.12), and they

experienced more impulsivity and emotion management issues. These deficits were in turn framed as something which impacted on the YAOs engagement with and response to prison regimes, licence conditions, supervision, interventions and services. The report claimed such “features of immaturity” (National Offender Management Service, 2015, p. 12) comprised significant risk factors for reoffending, and were therefore important areas to address in ensuring the future success of criminal justice interventions amongst this group.

Recently, and of huge relevance to the sustained pressure of the T2A Alliance, was the publication of two House of Commons Justice Committee reports, *The Treatment of Young Adults in the Criminal Justice System* (2016) and the follow up, *Young Adults in the Criminal Justice System* (2018). It is with these reports that arguably the biggest impact of the institutionalisation of the YAO in Government policy has been felt.

The initial inquiry brought together a wealth of research and practice in the field, and produced a lengthy set of conclusions and recommendations aimed at improving the experience and treatment of YA in the CJS. Following the damning findings of Lord Harris of Haringey’s report into self-inflicted deaths in custody of 18-24 year olds (Harris, 2015), the inquiry considered a wide range of research evidence relating to the specific needs and characteristics of young adult offenders. It drew directly from the work of the Alliance in exploring criminogenic factors including social background, psychological and neurological maturation and issues such as brain development, learning disability and acquired and traumatic brain injury. The conclusions of the report suggested there to be overwhelming evidence that the CJS did not adequately address the distinct needs of YAOs. Governance arrangements for YAOs were said to be “unsatisfactory”, and there was no account for varying levels of maturity and recognition of individual circumstances. The various age definitions applied by the Ministry of Justice, it was contended, were both confusing, and "[did] not inspire the coherent approach that young adults require if they are to engage effectively in their rehabilitation” (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2016, para.32). Additionally, the approaches of the Ministry or Justice, The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and other criminal justice agencies were not seen to give sufficient weight to the issues concerning brain maturation for young adults (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2016, para. 44). Dealing effectively with YA while the brain was still developing was argued as being crucial in helping this group make

successful transitions to a “crime-free adulthood”. (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2016, para. 24).

Recommendations from the inquiry were equally unwavering. They included a screening tool for assessing psychosocial maturity; moves for prevention and countering of violence and self-inflicted harm in custody; the guarantee of developmentally appropriate interventions designed to encourage desistance; the training of specialist criminal justice staff in dealing with young adults; and considerations of maturity in the Crown Prosecution Service Code and Sentencing Council guidelines. It was also advanced that “robust measures” should be put in place by the Youth Justice Board, the National Probation Service and NOMS to handle the transition from the youth justice system to adult services (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2016, para. 84). And, related to the last, that the youth justice system be extended to include young adults, in particular through the augmentation of YOIs to include up to 25 year olds.

The follow up report, *Young Adults in the Criminal Justice System* (2018) took up from where the initial inquiry ended, focussing on the Government’s response (Great Britain. Ministry of Justice, 2017). Describing it as “disappointing", the committee concluded the narrow approach taken had showed little positive impact on outcomes for YAOs. The key complaints were around a lack of follow through after maturity screenings, limited progress in addressing gaps in the evidence base for effective practice, and seemingly no progress in understanding the relative effectiveness of young adults’ custodial options (p.4). Though there were some positives, including attention being paid by Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and the Youth Offending Service (YOS) to the “cliff-edge” transitions between the youth and adult systems, and to the particular needs of care leavers, it was suggested there was still much to do. As the committee concluded:

> *…by 2030 we expect prison and probation services to have developed approaches which properly assess and address young adults’ needs, recognise their strengths, and support them to develop non-criminal identities, resulting in better outcomes both for them and society at large.*
>
> (Great Britain. House of Commons Justice Committee, 2018, p.4)

Though it is yet to be seen how this will translate in to action, these reports, along with other Government reports focussed on the experiences and ‘realities’ of 18-24 year olds in

the CJS, have now firmly embedded the YAO demographic, replete with its discourse of age-related needs, into mainstream criminal justice discourse.

This chapter has, at this point, fulsomely documented the emergence and subsequent institutionalisation of young adulthood within the CJS. It has outlined how this group came to be understood, how they have been constructed as a group 'in need', and how the Government has thus far responded to them. However, it is important to remain commensurately critical. In making the case for acknowledging and responding to YAOs as a distinct and separate group, consideration must be given to what the implications are of doing so. Alongside narratives of 'changing lives' and 'promoting positive futures', we might also question rehabilitative interventionism in terms of its role in producing dependency, helplessness and conformity. The next part of this chapter therefore, takes a critical look at the institutionalisation of young adulthood, considering issues of social control, and the role of discourse (in a Foucaultian sense) in shaping *subjectivities*.

1.4 Taking a critical position

The widening of the CJS to include a substantive focus on young adults does not operate in a vacuum. The impact of criminal justice interventions is not simply felt in terms of their ability to 'do good'. There is equally cause to consider what such interventions and services might do by way of bringing young adults further into the system, and by extension holding them there for longer. Here we might consider the tropes of 'net widening' and 'mesh thinning', as found in Cohen's (1985) explorations into social control (Brown, 2004, p.204).

1.4.1 'Net-widening and mesh-thinning'

In Stanley Cohen's important text, *Visions of Social Control,* (1985), he critiques twentieth century shifts in ideas and practices concerning crime and delinquency, particularly through the move towards "community corrections". Exploring the implications of such organised responses to crime, Cohen considers the potential for diversion, decriminalisation and decarceration to be, rather than 'benevolent reform' (Griffin, 2005),

mechanisms of formal social control. To illustrate this, he famously draws on the metaphor of the fisherman's net:

> *Imagine that the entrance to the deviancy control system is something like a gigantic fishing net. Strange and complex in its appearance and movements, the net is cast by an army of different fishermen and fisherwomen working all day and even into the night… subject to more or less authority and control from above, knowing more or less what the other is doing. Society is the ocean… Deviants are the fish. But unlike real fish… deviants are not caught, sorted out, cleaned, packed, purchased, cooked and eaten… the deviants are in fact kept alive (freeze-dried) and processed (shall we say punished, treated, corrected?)… Then those who are 'ready' are thrown back in the sea… Back in the ocean (often with tags and labels which they may find quite difficult to shake off) the returned fish might swim around in a free state for the rest of their lives. Or, more frequently, they might be swept up into the net again. This might happen over and over. Some wretched creatures spend their whole lives being endlessly cycled and recycled, caught and proceed and thrown back'.*
>
> (Cohen, 1985, pp.41-42)

As Cohen continues:

> *Our interest is in the operation of this net… First, there are matters of* quantity*: size, capacity, scope, reach, density, intensity. Just how wide are the nets being cast? Over a period of time, do they get extended to new sites, or is there a contraction? […] Second, there are questions about* identity*. Just how clear can the net and the rest of the apparatus be seen? Is it always visible as a net? Or is it sometimes masked, disguised or camouflaged? …Third, there is the* ripple *problem. What effect does all this activity… have on the rest of the sea? Do other non-fish objects inadvertently get caught up in the net?*
>
> (Cohen, 1985, p. 43)

Cohen asks us to consider what the intended and unintended impact is of widening state and community reach. Though perhaps noble in intention[5], what happens when those diagnosed as being 'in need' are drawn into the system and become dependent and controlled by it. In thinking about expansion of community control alongside the continued use of custody, Cohen discusses the impact of *net-widening*. Increasing numbers of people being drawn into the system, Cohen contends, has the subsequent result of often catching wrong populations in the net. Diversion, for example, is less a movement *out* of the system but rather a move *into* a programme in another part of the system (Griffin, 2005). The problems of early intervention mean exposing people who would not otherwise be in the system to be targeted for treatment. Moreover, once drawn in, the intensity of intervention will resultantly increase. As Griffin (2005) observes, the problem regarding

[5] 'Perhaps' in that although Cohen quite explicitly suggests such practices as manifestations of social control, though we might suppose not all agencies operate in such a deliberately subversive way

such alternative sanctions is therefore twofold. Firstly, the net is widened through subjecting a wider population to social control, and secondly, the mesh is thinned by diverting individuals into the system rather than screening them out. Ultimately, the increasing numbers of those caught up in formal systems creates a "blurring of boundaries" — inside/outside, guilty/innocent, freedom/captivity, imprisoned/released — it therefore becomes hard to see where the prison ends and the community begins (Newburn, 2017, p.350). What, we might then ask, is the operation of the net when it comes to YAOs, particularly in its capacity for regulation, over-intervention and diverting into further systems of social control?

1.4.2 Good intentions versus increased surveillance

The institutionalisation of young adulthood within the criminal justice practice has meant that a range of YAO services have now emerged in order to address the perceived needs of this group. This has particularly been the case within voluntary sector organisations. For example, as part of the early work of the T2A Alliance, three T2A pilot sites were selected to demonstrate new ways of involving the voluntary sector in supporting young adults under supervision by probation services. The pilot sites, located in London (led by St Giles Trust), Birmingham (led by the probation Trust) and Worcestershire (led by young people's charity, YSS), each offered mentoring, advocacy, and practical help with matters such as education, employment, accommodation and substance misuse (both in prison and in the community). The pilot sites ran for three years and through their results, did much to strengthen the Alliance's central arguments about the need for tailored support for this group. Outcomes for young adults involved in the T2A pilots comprised a reduction in breach rates and offending, and a rise in employment and housing outcomes. More recently, there has been the implementation of the T2A 'demonstration projects' (t2a.org.uk/work-in-progress/demonstration-projects) - a pathway approach for organisations working with 16-24 year olds throughout the criminal justice process. The projects, run exclusively by voluntary organisations[6], provide targeted initiatives to support young adults and address the underlying causes of crime. Though the T2A Alliance and its affiliates inarguably corner the market when it comes to services and support for YAOs they are not the only ones working in this area. Indeed, also prominent is independent

[6] Addaction; Advance; PACT (Prison Advice and Care Trust); The Prince's Trust; Remedi; and Together for Mental Wellbeing

charitable organisation, Switchback (switchback.org.uk) – a project based in North London, working with 18-25 year-old male offenders in prison and in the community. Switchback, now in its tenth year, offers mentoring and practical advice to YAO in areas concerning accommodation, employment and education. In addition, there was also the Greater Manchester Intensive Alternative to Custody (IAC) Pilot. Running from 2009-2011, the Manchester IAC Pilot (part of a larger project looking at alternatives to custody - see Lansbury, 2011) explored 'new pathways' to education, training and employment for 18-25 year old offenders. And finally, there have been local council based strategies, for example, the 2015 Islington Youth Crime Strategy (IYCS). The IYSC saw the recent inclusion of 18-24 year olds involved in gangs into their agenda. The strategy advocates the use of diversion from gang crime through better links to employment.

Though in many ways these organisations and services might be argued as 'doing good' for this population, there is also the contention that such focus brings with it more scrutiny. In particular, their capacity for increased monitoring and supervision, and by extension increased regulation and control. In thinking about such issues, it is helpful to draw on the work of Michel Foucault. In his text, *Discipline and Punish,* Foucault explores notions of surveillance and discipline. Using the birth of the prison as his locus, he documents the move towards disciplinary power through the change in punishment from the torture of the body to regulation of the soul. Drawing on Jeremy Bentham's ultimate prison system, The Panopticon, Foucault posits the effects of unknown observation on the observed. Bentham's Panopticon saw prisoners housed in a ring-shaped building comprised of individual cells, each watched from a central tower, light continually shining into each cell yet not back into the central tower itself. Through this design, the inmate was rendered in a permanent state of vulnerability. Never knowing whether or not he would be caught in any wrong-doing, he begins to engage in a continual process of self-regulation and self-discipline, assuring, as Foucault says (1991, p.201) "the automatic functioning of power". The prisoner becomes complicit in his own governance. 'Panopticism', more broadly, enables disciplinary power to function. Relying on surveillance and internalised self-regulation, a state of submission is achieved, as Foucault refers to it, "docile bodies". To draw the parallel, just as the uncertainty of observation worked to ensure that the controlled would control themselves (Rock, 2007, p.22), so too is such disciplinary power seen in modern, surveillant society.

Foucault's ideas about disciplinary society are important when considering the role these YAO organisations and services have in perpetuating this process. Foucault's concerns about the normalisation of individuals, and its related benefit to the state in assuring social control and social order, might well throw into question the benevolence of such practices. Though promoted as opportunities for support and guidance, and though they might well be that for many, there is also the contention that such services concurrently seek to regulate, normalise and operationalise young adult bodies to make them fit within the wider society. Indeed, rehabilitation has continually placed reintegration back into the community as one its primary goals. But, for whom is this most beneficial?

1.4.3 Questioning discourses of need and vulnerability

Though intentional (or unintentional) social control is one way in which the the state might imprint itself upon the lives of citizens, there are other ways in which the weight of institutions, processes and systems might be felt. And it is here that we now consider the effects of language, or rather discourse, in terms of its impact on the individual.

The social construction of the YAO brings with it, as has been discussed extensively throughout this chapter, a concomitant discourse of needs. The language used to explain the condition of young adulthood within the CJS favours certain typicalities. Both research and policy place this group as vulnerable, needful, and systematically disadvantaged by their social background. YAOs are commonly understood as having lower educational levels, poor mental health, challenging or complex personal relationships, age-related substance misuse issues, and cognitively speaking, undeveloped brains which subsequently affect their ability to make rational decisions (Grimshaw, 2016; T2A, 2017). But what is the effect of all this on how we then deal with YAOs, and more pertinently, how does this impact on how YAOs view and speak about themselves?

Foucault was particularly interested in the ways in which discourse operated within society. For Foucault, discourse is not simply an exchange of communication, rather he thought of it as historically and culturally understood *bodies of knowledge,* i.e. the ways in which we write, speak and think about a given social object or practice only in certain specific ways and not others (McHoul & Grace, 1993). In thinking about discourse then, we must also think about power. Power is essential to any understanding of Foucault's theory of

discourse (McHoul & Grace, 1993). Power, for Foucault, was different to traditional understandings of what it is and how it could be used. Rather than something that some privileged person or group might possess and exercise at will, Foucault saw power as everywhere (Foucault, 1979; Foucault, 1991), circulating throughout society, diffused and embodied in discourse, knowledge and “regimes of truth" (Foucault 1991; Rabinow 1991). Power imbues itself through discourse allowing for the production of a dominant reality and, through talk, is then produced and reproduced throughout society. What then does this do to the subjects and objects of discourse?

Foucault’s perspective on discourse assumes that the ways in which we make meaning is constructive and regulatory. It produces and delimits objects and subjects (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine 2008; Foucault 1972, 1982; Willig, 2008). Language, therefore, becomes a means of deploying, negotiating and resisting dominant and alternative discourses, whilst reinforcing, (re)inscribing, and reconfiguring power (Sutherland, LaMarre, Rice, Jeffrey, & Hart, 2016, p.388). Davies & Harré (1990) talk of *positioning* within discourse*,* specifically how certain subject positions are made possible within them, for example, that of the ‘the needful/vulnerable young adult offender’. The authors describe the ways in which discursive practices constitute “speakers and hearers" in certain ways, and yet equally allow for the negotiation of new positions (Davies & Harré, 1990, p.62). Moreover, in the taking up of these positions, Davies & Harré argue, we then see ourselves and others exclusively *from* that particular perspective.

> *Once having taken up a particular position as one’s own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, story lines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned.*
>
> (Davies & Harré, 1990, p.46)

Fundamentally, discourses represent institutionalised uses of language (Davies & Harré, 1990, p.45), and as Sutherland, LaMarre, Rice, Hardt & Jeffrey note (2016, p. 388), constrain subjectivity by setting parameters on possibilities for meaning and action for those assuming particular positions within them.

Jansen (2010), explores these issues directly in a study centred on young people’s experiences of living in residential care. Through interviews with twelve young people aged 14-18 years, Jansen identified young people as being caught between two contrasting

discourses, either ‘victim of abuse/inadequate care’ or ‘troublemaker’. In explaining their reasons for being in residential care, the young people were obliged to draw on certain discourses delineated by their position within Child Protection Services in order to make themselves intelligible (Jansen, 2010, p.435). In doing so, Jansen notes, certain ways of being were afforded to them and others were denied. Additionally, Holt (2010), in a study looking at the narrative accounts of 17 parents who had received Parenting Orders, examined the ways in which the group were forced to manage “spoiled identities” because of those Orders. The particular nature of court-sanctioning, and the spoiled identity it produced, Holt argues, shaped how parents subsequently experienced parenting support (Holt, 2010, p.344).

Nunkoosing & Haydon-Laurelut (2011) also consider such issues, but in relation to how institutions, systems and processes position others through the invocation of certain discourses (rather than the other way round, as in the work of Jansen and Holt). In their research exploring referral forms written by workers in residential services for people with learning difficulties, the authors examined the way power operates through the language of these referral texts. Specifically, how those with intellectual disabilities were positioned as a “problem to be solved”. The authors highlight the ways in which the referral forms removed agency from those concerned, and of most concern, justified the institution by placing the problem within the person with learning difficulty. Moreover, Mann, Menih & Smith (2014), in their research into how women involved in drug offences are constructed within the language of the courts, examined 36 sentencing transcripts from the New Zealand courts. In their findings, the authors identified three clearly gendered discourses. Firstly, the discourse of femininity, which the authors comment reinforces the socially prescribed female role. Secondly, the discourse of aberration concerning women who “breach" traditional gender role expectations. And thirdly, the discourse of salvation - presenting aberrant women with an opportunity to become ‘good’ women once again (Mann, Menih & Smith, 2014, p.368). The authors comment on the limitations that such discursive positioning has on the women concerned. The women were penalised for deviation from gender norms by being confronted with a series of stereotypical notions about gender and the gendered nature of their lives.

As these studies have usefully illustrated, identities are constrained in discourse. When we are discursively positioned, certain routes are made available to us whilst others are closed down. This might be in the ways in which organisations and state run systems treat

certain groups, in the case of Mann, Menih & Smith (2014) and Nunkoosing & Haydon-Laurelut (2011), *or* in how certain groups explain themselves, in the case of Jansen (2010) and Holt (2010). Though discursive positioning in itself isn't necessarily problematic, we can (arguably) resist such positioning, and it is important to reflect on what happens in social contexts where we do not have the choice. Specifically, what are the implications when an individual's placement within a particular programme or service demands their acceptance of certain narrative identities?

1.4.4 Performing to type

Loseke (2007) has some interesting ideas about narrative identity which are relevant here. In particular his notion of *organisational narrative identity.* He explains it as follows. Organisational narratives of identity are created by and for organisations, programmes and groups who seek to "repair identities defined as troubled and in need of repair" (p.670). For example, counselling centres, prisons, rape crisis centres, programmes for youths 'at risk' and so on. Organisational identity has a relationship with *institutional identity* — another of Loseke's terms — which is (broadly speaking) concerned with how identity is created within social policy. Such policies, he explains, have the capacity to shape services. Loseke uses the example of gay and lesbian youth, constructed in social policy as being 'at risk' for emotional, social and psychological problems. Gay and lesbian services are subsequently spawned, and have amongst their founding principles an image of this group as "gravely troubled" (p.670). People working within such organisations then use these narratives to create typical clients, which then justifies the ways these clients are handled or serviced by that organisation (Copes, 2016, p.195).

Loseke notes that narratives of organisational identity do not always stem from social policy. Some places begin their work with the stories and identities constructed by social activists (p.671), as has of course been the case with the construction of the YAO. However, regardless of the origins of organisational narratives of identity, services must hold tight to these images so that the use of certain processes and procedures can be justified (Loseke, 2007, p.671). As such, though there are times when these organisational narratives can aid rehabilitation, there are other times when they can hinder it (Copes, 2016, p.195).

Järvinen and Andersen (2009), in tackling this very matter, discuss how organisational narratives of harm reduction in Danish addiction-treatment contexts can act as barriers to substance use recovery. They found that institutional 'formula stories', which treat opiate addiction as an incurable condition, became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Addicts entering the treatment system were constructed as chronic addicts. This was regardless of how the group looked upon their own addiction problem. Such positioning saw many give up hope of ever becoming drug-free. Fox (1999) too in her observations of the dynamics of Cognitive Self-Change (CSC) treatment groups in a Vermont prison, discusses how coercion and resistance operate in the cognitive social control of violent offenders. Psychological paradigms about criminal personalities were "imposed on inmates", irrespective of whether they were recognised by the inmates themselves. Indeed, resistance to such narratives were absorbed and then held as evidence of the the *truth* of the discourse of criminal thinking (p.97). In a more recent yet similar study, Anderson & Sandberg (2017) conducted observations of a Danish anger management programme. The programme, steeped in a liberal approach which favoured a non-judgemental approach to anger and violence, explored notions of what it was to be "properly masculine". Though the approach was seen to work for one participant, able as he was to offer up stories of violence, and identify with the programme's understanding of what (typically, working-class) masculinity comprised, there was a lack of alignment for the other. The second participant struggled to meet the expectations embedded within the therapeutic frame, and as such was denied a recognisably masculine identity. The findings suggested that even well intentioned interventions might unintentionally marginalise some participants. Finally, Waldram (2007), in research conducted with sexual offenders in a Canadian prison-based treatment program, highlights the cognitive dissonance faced by offenders who were expected to corroborate 'factual' reports held about them in order to adhere to the programme's principles. Through his observations, Waldram found that inmates experienced confusion between autobiography and disclosure. Essentially, what they believed to be the facts of their life, compared to what facts were on record. Though some inmates acquiesced to the reshaping of their life story others remained intransigent, maintaining their story as they understood it (Waldram, 2007, p.166). This decision, however, affected how well they progressed in the program. As Waldram observes:

> *The inmate is successful in this aspect of treatment in so far as he accepts the official truth, participates in the rewriting of his life story, and communicates a cognitive shift in its meaning.*
>
> (Waldram, 2007, p147)

So far this chapter has explored the social construction of the YAO in practice and policy, and the potential concerns that drawing such intense scrutiny might bring. It has also explored how power operates through the language of systems and services, and applied that to how YAO services might perpetuate this in their ways thinking about and dealing with their young adult cohorts. What has not yet been considered however, is how the construction of young adulthood has been influenced and shaped by the group itself. Specifically, how YAOs have contributed to their own reification. This perspective is of great importance when considering, as the final part of this chapter will explore, what implications this has for the YAO services set up to support them.

1.5 Critiquing the user voice

1.5.1 Giving voice to the voiceless

Gathering the views and experiences of those affected by services, systems and policies is a staple of real world research, especially when it comes to the development of evidence-based policy and practice. From studies exploring the 'learner-voice' in educational programmes, the 'service-user voice' in public services research, and the voices of specific - often marginalised - groups affected by particular social issues (i.e. women; young people; religious groups; people with physical or learning disabilities; homeless communities; BAME populations etc.), a belief in the value of individual experience has held sway for decades. Simmons (2011, p.539) talks of the listening gap in public services, particularly with regard to service leaders. He notes listening to be widely recognised as an underdeveloped public sector competency, and one that needs to be narrowed. Nickman (2017) too, in research centred on the experiences of patients, discusses the criticality of qualitatively-based Patient Reported Outcomes (PROs) in understanding how medication pathways are navigated. The author contends that such patient focussed approaches might improve understanding of socio-cultural factors impacting patient decision-making. And most importantly, might support developing models of patient-centred care.

The strategic use of the *user voice* has been equally popular within criminology. Trivasse (2017), for example, in research exploring young offenders' views and experiences of the Youth Justice Service (YJS), argues that despite growing governmental support for the

involvement of young people in decisions which affect them, the CJS (specifically the YJS) has failed to place emphasis on its importance. Acknowledging and exploring young offenders' views regarding their involvement not only highlights effective strategies, he advises, but is also a crucial element of those strategies. Without it, young people do not feel valued or listened to, and are at rapid risk of becoming disengaged (Trivasse, 2017, p. 78). In addition, Gilbert (2019) in a recent piece of research challenging the effectiveness of Baroness Corston's (2007) recommendations for women in the criminal justice system, argues understanding women's needs is key to engagement. She contends, that where agencies and organisations wish to make improvements, accounts of lived experience are "the most appropriate source of evidence on which to base professional or agency intervention" (Gilbert, 2007, p.21). Moreover, Chui (2003), in tackling YAOs' experiences of probation in Hong Kong, argues that the role of offenders as 'service recipients' or 'customers' is largely neglected when it comes to commenting on the usefulness of a penal measure. As he contends, offenders are typically excluded from being asked for their opinions as citizens (Chui, 2003, p.567). He concludes that offenders have much to contribute to the evaluation process, and recommends that their voices should be heard by practitioners and policymakers in order to improve probation practice.

National reports too have underlined the importance of the user-voice perspective. Hart & Thompson (2009, p.4), in a report commissioned for the National Children's Bureau, comment that expectations of young offender involvement are often limited to the engagement of young offenders rather than enabling them to have a say in decision-making. Something, it is argued, that has often been conversely detrimental to their success. Further, NACRO (2008) in highlighting work undertaken with Barnados, comment that it is only young people themselves who can inform service providers as to what will and will not work for them (Nacro, 2008, p6). Additionally, Munro (2011), in outlining the recommendations for working with vulnerable children, states the need for a child-centred system, recognising young people as individuals with rights, and this including "their right to participate in major decisions made about them" (Munro, 2011, p.24). The belief in systems, processes and policy supported and guided by the user experience has made an indelible mark.

Perhaps most significantly here is the work of Mark Johnson, founder of User Voice (http://www.uservoice.org/). This criminal justice focussed charity, seeks to improve the rehabilitative experience through improving existing services and promoting active

citizenship. As the organisation's mission statement informs us, "At User Voice we know that the criminal justice system needs to be improved. We are optimistic that change is possible and we know that we have the experience and insight to contribute to making it better" (http://www.uservoice.org/our-story/). In their ten-year history, User Voice has worked consistently to close the gap between service providers and service users by encouraging collaborative working both led and delivered by ex-offenders. The organisation is built on the premise that it is only by listening to those affected by services, that we can understand how they are really experienced, engaged with and sustained.

In all of these cases, the user voice is constructed as an invaluable tool with which to shape, influence and motivate policy and practice. These voices, research tells us, hold specific expertise and insider knowledge. By attending to them, we are given access to the inner worlds of others. So how then has the user voice perspective been incorporated into the construction of the YAO? And more pertinently, for what effect?

1.5.2 The voices of young adult offenders

As has been previously discussed, the Transition to Adulthood (T2A) Alliance has been instrumental in constructing the YAO with his concomitant discourse of needs. Drawing on the knowledge of researchers, criminologists, criminal justice professionals, and other relevant people and organisations, the T2A Alliance have created a dossier of facts which indelibly forge the YAO as a *real* demographic within the CJS. As part of this reification process, the voices of YAOs have been called on to add crucial support both for the argument of the existence of the group, and the subsequent necessity for the age-specific services which support them.

Young adult voices are a clear feature of the early reports of the T2A Alliance. The Barrow Cadbury Trust's *Lost in Transition* report, for example, begins with the case study of 'Byron'. Byron's story follows what we might understand as the typical history of the repeat offender e.g. a victim of childhood abuse, an adolescence spent in social care, a history of violence and 'scrapes' with the law, difficulties with school, substance misuse issues, prison, and upon release, homelessness. Adding to the picture, however, are the age-specific issues faced by Byron. Considered "too old for Connexions", "fired from the New Deal scheme" (BCT, 2005, p.6), and damaged by the impact of Young Offender

Institutions, Byron's prospects are presented as significantly reduced due to his vulnerable age. Byron's story is juxtaposed with Jason, a friend and accomplice just five months younger. Though Jason is supported and guided by the Youth Offending Service, Byron is thrust into the adult prison estate, thrown up against "a legal frontier" (BCT, 2005, p.6) We are left to understand Byron as an inevitable victim of the adult justice system. Moreover, alongside Byron's case study, are the experiences of other young adults in the system, depicted through verbatim quotes outlining starkly similar age-specific concerns. As a particular quote from one young women informs us, "When you're 16, you get help. When you're 18, you're left on your own" (BCT, 2005, p.9). Early adulthood, it is made clear through these young adult voices, is a marked social danger when it comes to criminal justice.

The use of YAO voices is also found in an early report by the Howard League, *Access Denied: Young Adults in Prison.* In this 2010 study, the stories of YA in the CJS are used to draw attention to issues relating to mental health, substance misuse, lack of support from family, homelessness, suicide and self-harm, and many others tethered to histories of abuse and neglect. As with *Lost in Transition*, the report highlights particular age-specific issues, all staunchly underlined by the voices of the YA themselves. Similar methodological approaches are found in the Barrow Cadbury Trust's 2009, *Coping with Kidulthood: The hidden truth behind Britain's abandoned adolescents.* The research, focussed on the experiences of polarised young people in Britain, contrasts the life experiences of a group of male young offenders with a group of male university students. Drawing on their verbatim accounts, the authors highlight common themes drawn on by YA from both worlds. For example, economic instability, the conflict between a family identity and an independent social self, personal aspirations versus parental expectations, and the challenges involved with navigating complex dynamics within peer group relationships. In both reports, the validity of young adulthood is given significant weight by the voiced accounts of those placed as currently experiencing it.

The studies and reports explored thus far have one notable feature in common. They all position the user voice as an unbiased, independent source of knowledge; a guest expert able to 'tell it like it is'. However, perceiving the user voice in this way is an interesting position to take, especially when it comes to research concerned with demonstrating measurable outcomes. Though such qualitative approaches may offer useful insights into the lived experiences others (dependent on your epistemological beliefs, of course), it

should not be misunderstood as a strings-free process. User voice research serves a particular function.

1.5.3 Young adult voices as devices of justification

The success of any service is dependent on how that service is taken up. To have value, it must be seen to be providing something of which there is demonstrable need. For YAO organisations, this means evidencing that their age-specific services are perceived as relevant and necessary by their target demographic (not to mention, those that fund such services). To ensure this connection between service provider and service user, research relies on the user voice in order to bring the two together. This is both in building the initial demand for that service, *and* in justifying its continued existence.

A particularly relevant piece of research to draw on in exploring this matter further concerns an evaluation of the T2A pilot sites[7] undertaken by Oxford University researchers, Ros Burnett & Gisella Hanley Santos. Commissioned by the Barrow Cadbury Trust to assess the impact of the first T2A services, Burnett & Hanley Santos (2011) interviewed 10-15 young adult offenders from each of the three T2A pilot sites in order to capture, what the authors specifically refer to as “the service user voice”. The interviews focussed on a range of issues including YAOs’ thoughts on the T2A service, their assessments of how their needs were being met by that service, their routes into and out of crime, and their perceptions of the future (including the potential for reoffending). To adhere to the requirements of the formative nature of the evaluation, the interviews ran at two time points - one at the beginning of their T2A experience, and one 4-6 months later, to get some form of measure of distance travelled. The findings of the evaluation saw the YA claiming clear and tangible benefits from their T2A experience. Accessing the pilots, it was reported, strengthened their agency, supported them in navigating an unfriendly adult criminal justice system, and facilitated their journeys towards positive futures.

However, as positive and welcome as these findings no doubt were both to the T2A pilot sites and the Barrow Cadbury Trust who commissioned them, it is interesting to look at how these positive outcomes were presented. Indeed, what feels most noteworthy is not

[7] The T2A pilot sites refer to those introduced on page 41

the findings per se, nor that they were a direct result of raising the voices of those affected by such interventions, but at the position seemingly taken by the authors.

Within the report, several references are made to how the young adults' perceptions of success echoed the intended goals of the T2A services. For example, the authors note how YA perspectives were in "harmony" with practitioner perspectives (p.75), and that young adults experienced T2A in a way that was "closely aligned" to both the project's intentions, and the practitioners' theories on how their service was working (p.59). Though not necessarily tactical, the comments lay solid foundations for the argument that the T2A pilots are certainly *on the right lines.* Additionally, there is something too in the language used. Pitched in superlatives, the young adults' feedback to the projects are explained as both "resoundingly""(p.49) and "overwhelmingly" (p.58) positive. Such strong claims of impact subsequently leave little room for doubt. And then there is how the authors deal with challenges presented by *quantitative* indicators of success. One of the intentions of the T2A pilots was that they would aid in the reduction of further offending. Problematically though, the young adults' self-report data *and* the key worker reports saw reoffending data to be "mixed" (p.49), a finding that has potential to open up uncomfortable questions about the initiative's effectiveness. In tackling this, the authors opt to reframe this as a positive by invoking the qualitative measure of "distance travelled". Rather than failing to show a significant reduction in reoffending, focus is shifted to softer outcomes which situate *pathways* to desistance through improvements in the young adults' personal and social circumstances (p.49). Read all together, these linguistic techniques operate to signal irrefutable markers of success. As a reader, we do not appear to be invited to see the YAOs' comments in any other way.

Arguably, the most transparent example of this positive reframing is found in how the authors address the young adults' protestations about the lack of key worker contact. As they comment:

> *…the only recurrent complaint is, in effect, a back-handed compliment: insufficient contact, especially among the London participants who expressed the view that more workers were needed in their area.*
>
> (Burnett & Hanley Santos, 2011, p.58)

Here, the absence of key workers is not presented as a negative, a problem of time, money or resources. Instead, it is set up as an indicator of the immense value the YA place

on staff. This legitimate criticism is rebranded as a back-handed compliment. We are left to assume that these services are so well configured that the *only* issue is that the people want more. Once again the crucial importance of the service, as articulated through the voices of the YAOs themselves, is firmly reinforced.

The reason for such a detailed critique of this evaluation report is not, in some mean-spirited way, to discredit the work of the researchers. (Let us not forget it is *always* the analyst's privilege to decide which data are attended to and which are not). Nor is it to suggest that the T2A pilots do not have great value in terms of the benefits they afford to the YA accessing them[8]. Instead it is to illustrate how voices can be shaped to serve a purpose. As noted at the opening of this section, society, functioning in the way it does, demands that programmes, services and systems demonstrate their effectiveness in order to stand any chance of survival (Hedley et al., 2010). Those that fail to do so run the risk of falling short in an increasingly competitive sector (Hedley et al., 2010, p.16). This is a point that Burnett & Hanley Santos make themselves (Burnett & Hanley Santos, 2011, p.94). Evaluations commissioned to assess this effectiveness therefore, are particularly invested in finding ways to prove that is the case. Indeed, when it comes to demonstrating worth, the user voice stamp of approval carries significant weight.

So, what can we take from all this then? Two things are apparent. Firstly, it is unwise to consider the inclusion of the service user voice as some robust indicator that individual experience has been fully accounted for. Though drawing from people's unique and substantive experiences has shown to be an effective approach in influencing and mobilising social change, as in the case of Mark Johnson's User Voice project, it does not automatically translate that individuals and groups are being perfectly represented. This is particularly in instances where those views are being utilised to support a particular position.

And secondly, there is the problem of 'truth'. Qualitative research practices in the world of programmes evaluations invariably place service users as 'experts in their own lives' As previously commented, they are staged as independent sources of knowledge, able to 'tell it like it is'. This expert status thus situates people's views and experiences as irrefutable markers of truth, albeit subjective ones. However, as this chapter has explored, truths can

[8] Through my former work with the T2A Alliance, I have seen first hand the impact such services have on the young people that access them.

be influenced and shaped. Indeed, as Burnett & Hanley Santos note of their own data, their service user perspectives were, “probably influenced by the practitioners’ perspectives on how T2A constructively contributes towards positive change” (Burnett & Hanley Santos, 2011, p.75). Given this, we might well question how valuable such views are in service development when they are so easily influenced.

Conclusion

In addressing what has been perceived as a particular and immediate concern, the third sector has made a robust case for the recognition of the new demographic of the young adult offender, replete with his suitcase of age-specific needs. As part of this process of institutionalisation, a range of YAO services have been set up expressly for the purpose of meeting those needs. To lend weight to the argument, the voices of young adults themselves have been called on. This has been to both strengthen the case for the existence of this group (BCT, 2005; BCT, 2009; The Howard League for Penal Reform, 2010) and to justify the need for the services which support them (e.g. Burnett & Hanley, 2011; Devitt & Lowe, 2010). Though, as has been clearly stated, it is not the intention of this thesis to suggest there isn’t great value to these services. It *is* its intention to question the implications of being wedded to a particular set of beliefs (e.g. what a ‘young adult offender’ looks like, and what they are ‘in need’ of), especially when those beliefs directly affect how this group are perceived and subsequently dealt with.

The construction of a new demographic should never be accepted unquestioningly as a ‘good’ thing, even if it is done with good intentions. Though acquiescing to a particular identity might mean certain routes are opened up (e.g. being given access to tailored support and help), others are then inevitably closed down (e.g. being seen as well adjusted, competent and reliable). Though this problem of power might arguably be resolved by allowing individuals the platform with which to ‘speak their own truths’, voices (as we have seen) are open to manipulation (Burnett & Hanley Santos, 2011) albeit well intentioned manipulation.

There is no doubt of the importance of the YAO perspective when it comes to criminal justice interventions. It is, after all, always better to ask someone about matters which

affect them rather than assume knowledge. However, we must equally remain conscious of the limitations of that knowledge. The task then seems to be in asking the right methodological questions. Instead of concerning ourselves with how to mitigate the issues described in this chapter, we might be better served by focussing on other, less agenda driven methodologies. By not taking as the start point the needful, dependent YAO, it is possible that different identities might play out, and ones that do not necessarily conform to the image of the YAO as understood by the systems and services set up to support them. The following chapter, therefore, considers the value of a narratological perspective in exploring the constructed worlds of 18-25 year olds in the CJS. In particular, it discusses what a critical narrative perspective might offer.

Chapter 2 - Taking the narrative turn

In the last chapter, the institutionalisation of the young adult offender within criminal justice policy and practice was discussed. However, caution was raised about the potentially disempowering, even alienating implications for the young adults themselves. Though it was suggested that such pitfalls might be avoided by involving young adults in the decisions made about them, these views, it was argued, are often open to manipulation - albeit well intentioned manipulation. It ended by asking if there are better ways in which a young adult offender perspective might be drawn.

The following chapter, therefore, considers the value of what a narratological perspective might offer. It begins with a brief account of the role of narratives in explaining and making sense of people's lives, progressing on to a more detailed account of how narrative has been used within the discipline of criminology. Within this, the problem of pursuing narrative truth is discussed, thinking particularly of criminology's location within the wider field of criminal justice - a field that claims truth and facticity as its most basic tenet. The relatively new discipline of narrative criminology is then introduced, along with an account of similar approaches in other related fields. Through this, important issues of methodology and epistemology are discussed. The chapter concludes with an account of the aims of this thesis in its intention to explore the narrated worlds of young adult offenders from a phenomenologically informed, yet commensurately critical perspective.

2.1 The role of the narrative

Throughout history, telling stories has proved to be one of the most common and enduring ways with which we communicate. We share stories every day, in a myriad of ways, and for a multitude of purposes. People seem to have a fundamental drive to both relay and listen to them (Sandberg & Ugelvik, 2016), with human interaction often revolving around the very process of storytelling (Copes, 2016). Stories, or narratives[9], are used for a variety of functions. They are a vessel with which to translate experience. They can share

[9] In this thesis, the terms 'stories' and 'narratives' are used interchangeably, both represented by the descriptions outlined in this chapter.

and demonstrate knowledge, and by doing so educate and inform others. They can entertain. They can shock. They are a medium with which to convey emotion, communicating our understanding, empathy, frustration and resistance. They are a technique for opening a dialogue and encouraging debate, yet equally can bewilder and silence too. They can even operate as a tool of social action themselves (e.g. Holt, 2009; 2010; Presser, 2009; Presser and Sandberg, 2015) galvanising populations and propelling change. As a way of obtaining knowledge, they are invaluable to our understanding of how people construct their social worlds.

Narrative as a methodological approach, is different from 'just talk'. Unlike the type of data typically produced through more traditional semi-structured interviews, (usually fractured due to the researcher's investment in pursuing particular topics in a particular order), narratives seek a coherent whole. They have temporality, one event following another, causality, one event caused by another (Sandberg, 2016), and are orientated towards a plot (Polkinghorne, 1988, p.38). Functionally, narratives enable us to make sense, both of ourselves *and* the social world with which we inhabit (Bruner, 1986, 2004; Denzin, 1989; Presser & Sandberg, 2019; Sandberg & Ugelvik, 2016; Somers, 1994). They enable us to see how individuals interpret the events of their lives (Spruin, Canter, Youngs & Coulston, 2014). Indeed, it is via storytelling that conventions are culturally circumscribed (Presser, 2009, P.178). The uses and purposes of story-telling are never-ending, and are as much embedded in our psyche as language itself.

Narratives are also inextricably tied up with identity. They are one of the most important ways with which we produce a concept of self (Bruner, 2003; Copes, 2016). Individuals make sense of their lives by developing a story with themselves as the central character (Ioannou, Canter, Youngs & Synnott, 2015; Spruin, Canter, Youngs & Coulston, 2014). This narrative self then weaves together the reconstructed past, the perceived present, and the imagined future (Adler et al., 2017). Through our stories, we shape and uphold our cultures and identities (Fleetwood, 2016; Sandberg, 2016). We are able to make clear who we are (Canter, Ioannou, and Youngs, 2009; Ioannou, Synnott, Lowe, Tzani-Pepelasi, 2018; Youngs & Canter, 2012) *and* who we are not (Copes, 2016; Copes, Hochstetler & Williams, 2008), and by doing so communicate and reproduce in-group solidarity (Sandberg & Ugelvik, 2016). Narrative telling also allows us to affirm and justify problematic identities (e.g. Maruna, 2001; Sykes & Matza, 1957) and reframe/reconstruct spoiled or stigmatised identities (e.g. Holt, 2010; Maruna, 2001). We want to present

ourselves in our best light, and we utilise narratives to help us navigate the tricky terrain of a social world that might seek to do otherwise. As Fleetwood (2016) contests, narrative establishes a 'dialectic' between past actions and the present self, allowing a space for "reflection, agency and the creation of a 'new' identity" (Fleetwood, 2016, p.176). A particularly useful tool when problematic identities, such as that of 'the criminal', might make negotiating the world just that bit harder.

As an approach, the narrative method offers much. It has been part of the narrative fabric of the social sciences for over a hundred years. But, in considering its use as a tool of understanding the constructed worlds of young adult offenders, it is important to understand the role of narrative within criminology's history.

2.1.1 The history of narratives in criminology

The use of offenders' stories has a "venerable tradition" in criminology (Presser, 2009, p178). Narratives have relevance because, as Polkinghorne contends, "they provide the fundamental scheme for linking individual human actions and events, into interrelated aspects of an understandable composite" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p.13). Following Ioannou, Canter, Youngs & Synnott's, (2015, p.384) summary here, they link the actor to his actions. Through narrative, the criminal tells us how he has chosen to live his life (Ioannou, Canter, Youngs & Synnott, 2015, p.384).

The ethnographic work of the early 20th Century Chicago School scholars comprise some of the first examples of the use of narrative to explore the lives of offenders. These studies were seen to provide clear depictions of both urban pathology, *and* understandings of the development of delinquency (Gelsthorpe, 2007, p.516). Amongst these studies, perhaps best known is Clifford R. Shaw's (1930) study of Stanley, *The Jack-Roller*. Stanley's story was essentially about one young man narrating his experiences of a life of street crime. However, Shaw's social biography of Stanley helped to establish the life-history as an invaluable instrument of criminological research.

Life stories like this were interpreted rather literally by the Chicago School criminologists (Maruna & Copes, 2005). Constructed as a straightforward and representational, they were seen to provide "concrete and vivid" accounts of the lives of young people in

disadvantaged areas (Shaw 1930, p. 124). There was no attempt to pursue an "idiosyncratic point of view" (Finestone 1976, p. 101). Presser (2016), in also drawing attention to this matter, notes Shaw's impatience with subjectivity, seeing it not as an opportunity but "a limitation" (Shaw, 1930, cited in Presser, 2016, p.142). For this group of sociologists, narratives were the conduit of reality. Individual peculiarities were thus decidedly unwelcome. Though less common today, the literalist tradition within criminology has continued, for example in the work of Garofalo, Siegel & Laub (1987), Laub and Sampson (2003), and Agnew (2006).

Notable too when it comes to exploring criminal narratives, is the work of Gresham Sykes and David Matza (1957), with their longstanding *techniques of neutralization* theory. Though perhaps not explained by the authors themselves as narrative, we might follow Maruna & Copes (2005, p.227) in their proclamation that situating neutralization techniques as part of the narrative process "makes sense theoretically", given it reflects the process of individuals making meaning out of their lives.

Looking at the justifications of criminality and criminal behaviour then, Sykes and Matza considered the narrative excursions made into constructing good and moral selves in explaining histories of harm. The authors famously introduced five techniques of neutralization including 1) denial of responsibility - "it wasn't my fault" (often playing to the trope of a victim of social circumstances); 2) denial of injury - "it didn't cause harm or hurt anyone"; 3) denial of the victim - "he/she deserved it", a form of rightful retaliation or punishment (p.668); 4) condemnation of condemners — "they are hypocrites anyway", those casting judgement cause harm or do wrong themselves; and 5) appeal to higher authorities, "I had to do it" - assuming a moral/ethical position that may *inconveniently* lie in conflict with the law. Matza & Sykes' approach saw the narratives of offenders not as a record of truth of facticity, but of subjectivity. Giving insight, as they understood it, into how criminality might be understood by the perpetrators themselves. Justifications (or rationalisations) for crimes, they contend, are seen as valid by the delinquent though perhaps not by the legal system nor indeed the wider society (Matza & Sykes, 1957, p. 666).

Amongst the most significant works to consider the role of narrative from a criminological perspective is Shadd Maruna's (2001) hugely important text, *Making Good.* Based on the findings from the Liverpool Desistance Study, a piece of research investigating the process

of ‘going straight’ from the point of view of ex-prisoners living in Liverpool, Maruna explored the narratives of 50 men and women. 30 of the sample were classified as persisters, those who had returned to crime after release, 20 were considered desisters, those who had reported over a year of crime free behaviour.[10] The aim of the research was to see whether desisting ex-offenders shared characteristic ways of thinking, and if these patterns systematically differed from the way active offenders saw the world (Maruna, 2004, p.223). Through his research, Maruna was able to demonstrate key differences in the way persisters and desisters narrated their life stories. Of the persisters, Maruna found them to be invested in a deterministic point of view, one which constructed their offending as inevitable. They were “doomed to deviance” (Maruna, 2001). They presented as pawns or victims of forces outside of their control (Maruna, 2004, p.224), trapped as they were in a continual cycle of poverty, stigma and criminal associates (ibid, p.225). The desisters’, however, constructed identities of moral saviours; cautionary tales for ‘would-be’ offenders. They displayed “an almost missionary sense of purpose” (Maruna, 2001, p.9), presenting as super-achievers, hypermoral and evangelistic (Crow, 2002, p.813). Commensurate to this was an investment in preserving an image of their inner goodness. Though they were aware that they had done bad things, this was not indicative of who they “really” were. Their vision of desistance, therefore, was one of renewal, strength, finding who they really were, and bettering themselves (Maruna, 2004, p.226).

One of the study’s primary conclusions was that change was as much about being able to “renarrativise” the past (Gadd, 2003, p.318) as it was about addressing the social factors which lead to criminality. As such, the desisters’ narratives were subject to change as their experiences, and more broadly their world view, changed. As Larsson observes, by narrating themselves as positive, resourceful and capable, the narrators “talk[ed]’ those selves into being” (Larsson, 2019, p.319). This particular conclusion throws up instant questions around truth. Specifically, if this group are able to renarrativise their past, what in fact is the ‘true’ story? If indeed there is one at all. In a review of *Making Good*, Crow (2002), criticises Maruna for his apparent disinterest in pursuing truthful accounts of desistance. Focussing on his notion of the “core self” or “real me” (where individuals saw themselves as intrinsically good, but having done bad things), Crow raises concern at the narrators being able to rewrite themselves as ‘good people’. He postulates that such reframing denies responsibility for their former offending behaviour. He also warned of

[10] 65 men and women were interviewed in total, but 15 did not match the criteria for either group

such a position not sitting well with those requiring overcoming denial to be a core part of their rehabilitation approach (p.813). Interestingly, a point which Gadd (2003) also attends to (p.316).

Crow's point is an important one. For a discipline situated within a wider field which has truth as its central component, a disinterest in pursuing it has potential to be rather problematic. The next section of this chapter then, considers truth in relation to criminological research, and explores ways in which problems of truth might be usefully circumvented.

2.2 Criminology, epistemology and the quest for truth

Truth is a particularly tricky terrain to navigate within the social sciences. It requires the researcher to consider carefully his or her epistemological, and frequently ontological, position. Truth claims, even for the staunch positivist, are contestable, and this is particularly so for the criminological researcher. As has been noted before, given the criminologist's location within a field which privileges facticity above all else, the search for truth can be a frustrating and often unhelpful endeavour.

2.2.1 Criminology and the preoccupation with truth

Criminology is "wedded to facticity" (Presser, 2016, p.146) - facts about causality; facts about criminal events; facts about *what works* in reducing crime and criminal behaviour. Influenced and shaped as it is by a wider system which positions these factors as fundamental to its practice, the epistemological and methodological interests of the discipline have largely been rooted in positivistic notions of what can be proved and disproved. The validity of such data has thus been a constant challenge for criminologists and criminal justice professionals alike (Presser, 2009). Though seeing the world through a qualitative lens has had its role in criminology's methodological history, there has been notably more reluctance than other disciplines to see the value in a narrative perspective. As has been widely stated, it was amongst the last of the social sciences to take the narrative turn (Fleetwood, 2016; Presser, 2016; Presser & Sandberg, 2018; Pemberton, Mulder, & Aarten, 2019).

One of the principal reasons for narrative's historically unsettled placement within criminology is due to its primary object of interest - the 'duplicitous' offender. A population frequently characterised as untrustworthy, wily and manipulative (Horn & Hollin, 1997; Semrad, 2019; Willén & Strömwall 2011, 2012), offenders and their stories have been viewed with particular skepticism (Sandberg, 2016). As Trott (1996) notably informs us based on experiences of acting as a Senior United States Circuit Judge in the US Court of Appeals:

> *A prosecutor who does not appreciate the perils of using rewarded criminals as witnesses risks compromising the truth-seeking mission of our criminal justice system… we expect prosecutors and investigators to take all reasonable measures to safeguard the system against such treachery.*
>
> (The Honorable Stephen S.Trott, 1996)

Though obviously a dated example, and one based on the United States justice system, the sentiment resonates. Such warnings might easily be given by those within British criminal justice circles in the present day.

Questions of "the truth" dominate an offender's life from the moment of his/her arrest (Waldram, 2007). Their crime narrative becomes a matter of record, and is repeated at all stages of the system. It is tracked for accuracy and consistency, and as a consequence the offender remains forever accountable to it. Dollinger (2018) highlights the inherent bind these narratives have in certain (legal) contexts. He talks of the evaluations made regarding norm violations, and to what extent they correspond to cultural and institutional expectations. Criminal investigations and trials, he notes, are textbook examples of such evaluations. Only specific narratives are assessed as authentic and credible, whereas others are found wanting (Dollinger, 2018, p.478).

This collective sense of mistrust stems, of course, from what such duplicity is perceived to afford. Due to their position in being potentially advantaged (or disadvantaged) through the revelation of certain narratives (e.g. being released on parole, [Presser, 2009], or evading incarceration or other punishments such as monetary fines, [Semrad, 2019], offenders are all too often cast as unreliable reporters. As Presser observes of the cultural understandings of offenders (usually through television shows), suspects are "routinely depicted as telling false stories to avoid sanctions" (Presser, 2009, p.181). Branches of positivistic research have devoted entire studies to explaining the offender as a master

strategist of lies and manipulation (e.g. Willén & Strömwall, 2011; Willén & Strömwall, 2012).

These issues of truth and facticity are also a challenge for the criminologist. Though ethical and methodological concerns are apparent within any research dynamic when it comes to getting valuable and relevant data, these issues are more difficult to reconcile when the subjects of study are engaged in illegal activity (Sandberg, 2010, p.448). Again, given the offender's potential investment in being seen in this way or that, the researcher might well be left in doubt as to whether the story they are hearing is the 'real' one. But, when it comes down to it, and here we might echo Maruna's stance, need we be so concerned with truth? When all is considered, is it perhaps better to sidestep the quest for truth altogether, valuing not narrative certainty but narrative complexity? As Sandberg (2010) cogently notes:

> *…Whether true or false, the multitude of stories people tell reflect, and help us understand, the complex nature of values, identities, cultures, and communities. Thus, "truth" may not be the best measure of interesting and theoretically relevant data.*
>
> (Sandberg, 2010, p.448)

2.2.2 Circumventing truth

Maruna (2015) states narratives of crime, though an unmistakable source of evidence, are not means with which to access truth, nor do they account for criminality (in the sense of providing watertight causal explanations). They are biased, and influenced by the circumstances and audience of the telling (Maruna, 2015, p.ix). Rather than reflecting back some essential reality about the world, instead narratives might offer us insight into how culture and society has imprinted itself upon that individual, and (as *Making Good* showed us) how they might intend to act upon the world because of it. Gadd (2003) too criticises criminology's concern with truth but from a linguistic perspective. Narratives are always subject to change, he argues, given that meaning is negotiated intersubjectively. Therefore truth is dependent on its telling *and* its interpretation. As he observes:

> *…herein lies another important insight often lost on criminologists: namely that what people say about their lives can only ever be partly true. Narratives of life are always susceptible to interpretation, constantly reworked as they are retold during research and every day life.*
>
> (Gadd, 2003, p.318)

The question, of course, is what can be done about this?

Lois Presser and Svienung Sandberg are amongst a group of criminologists who have considered other ways to understand the role of criminal narratives - ways which do not have as their central focus, the problematic goal of seeking narrative truth. Presser, in particular, has argued the shortsightedness of only seeing narratives as having value in as much as they equate to a truthful account of what *really* happened (Presser, 2009, p.181). Her main complaint is that such a position implies that some stories are *real* whilst others are fabrications or inventions. This, she claims, belies a false view of stories as social artefacts for some, "when they are social artifacts for all" (ibid). Rather, in Presser and Sandberg's particular view of narrative, they advocate for an approach which does not seek truth as the object of interview or analysis. Instead, they are interested in what criminal narratives *do*. Specifically, what they might tell us about future (criminal) action.

2.3 Towards a Narrative Criminology

Narrative criminology (NC) is a (relatively) new sub-discipline, sitting within the wider field of criminology. It contains aspects of narrative psychology, ethnomethodology, cultural structuralism and postmodernism (Sandberg, 2016). Narrative criminology operates from a belief that narratives influence and shape future action (Presser, 2009). It is interested in how narratives motivate, sustain, mitigate and make sense of harm (Fleetwood, 2016; Presser, 2016; Presser & Sandberg, 2015; Presser & Sandberg, 2018; Raitanen, Sandberg, & Oksanen, 2019; Sandberg, 2016; Sandberg & Ugelvik, 2016). Rather than being a means with which to simply convey past events, as a traditional phenomenological approach would understand it, the narratives themselves are considered criminogenic (Sandberg, 2016). This particular lens with which to understand the role of narratives situates them as antecedents of crime (Presser, 2009) and as such comprises the immediate cause of offending (Presser & Sandberg, 2015). As Ioannou, Synnott, Lowe, Tzani-Pepelasi (2018, p.4093) explain it, offending is 'the enactment of a narrative'.

Accordingly, understanding narratives as shaping of future action also sees them as contributing to desistance from harm (Presser & Sandberg, 2015; Raitanen, Sandberg, & Oksanen, 2019; Sandberg & Ugelvik, 2016). As much as a given narrative might construct

a violent identity articulating an intent towards further violence, another might situate an individual actor's *resistance* to such patterns of harm (Presser & Sandberg, 2018, p.131). In either way of looking at it, the narrative acts as the root cause of action.

In its application, narrative analysis has been used to explore the way harmful and criminal actions are motivated, sustained and resisted in a wide range of ways. For example in research exploring crack cocaine users (Copes, Hochstetler, & Williams, 2008), drug dealing (Sandberg, 2009a), street violence and the 'code of the street' (Brookman, Bennett, Hochstetler, & Copes, 2011), cannabis use (Sandberg, 2012), mass murder (Presser, 2012), terrorism (Joosse, Bucerius, & Thompson, 2015; Sandberg, 2013), drinking (Tutenges & Sandberg, 2013), violence (Brookman, 2015), decision-making strategies of carjackers who steal cars using violence (Copes, Hochstetler, & Sandberg, 2015),) storytelling among policemen at the police station (Van Hulst, 2013), female crack cocaine dealers (Fleetwood, 2014) and women's lawbreaking (Fleetwood, 2015). Interestingly, narrative criminology has also made way for narrative victimology. Like NC, the truth of the stories is not of immediate concern, but rather how people experience wrongdoing. This very similar approach focuses on understanding what has been done, and how that relates to subsequent motivations, behaviours and actions (Pemberton, Mulder, & Aarten, 2019, p.393).

However, NC is not just a way of understanding future criminality (or desistance). It is also a process of analysis. In this regard, it is as much a methodological approach as it is a theoretical one (Sandberg, 2016). Narrative criminologists examine the types, composition and mechanics of stories that influence harm-doing (Presser & Sandberg, 2018, p.132), asking, what characters are being assigned? What plot lines are being developed? The primary task is in analysing talk as action (Sandberg, 2010), studying in detail how narratives motivate and restrain crime and harm (Sandberg, 2016, p.156). In a similar vein to the approach taken by discourse analysts then, language is privileged and action is understood as discursively constructed (Dollinger, 2018, Fleetwood, 2016; Presser & Sandberg, 2015).

As part of this analytic process, attention is paid to the reasons *why* certain narratives are drawn on and, from a social constructionist point of view, how the very nature of their telling contributes to the making and shaping of the world. Rather than reading narratives as descriptions and records of events, narrative analysis asks '*why was the story told that*

way?" (Fleetwood, 2016, p.175). In this regard, narrative criminology also "hews to a critical perspective" (Presser &Sandberg, 2005, p.1), understanding the role that power and agency have in shaping discourse.

This additional part of the process takes places in two ways. Firstly, it is in how the analyst attends to the sociocultural foundations of the narratives e.g. how stories are produced by social, spatial, ethnic and economic structures. By exploring the pool of language and meaning that narrators have available to them, their sociocultural repertoires, narrative scholars are able to address how any number of social categories operate in the world e.g. race, class, gender, sexuality, physical ability, and nationality (Presser & Sandberg, 2018). This level of analysis offers important insights into the established nature of identities, values, communities and cultures (Raitanen, Sandberg, & Oksanen, 2019; Sandberg, 2010). It allows the researcher to identify how the 'official truths' that organise and sustain social order get constructed and reconstructed (Presser, 2016, p.143). And secondly, the analyst attends to the social context of narratives i.e. the circumstances of the narrative's production. At this level, attention is paid to the effects that time, place, context, narrator and audience may have on the interpretation and effects of storytelling (Sandberg, 2016, p.156). Indeed, narrative scholars understand stories to be regulated by and tailored to particular audiences, settings and circumstances (e.g. Cook and Powell, 2006; Mishler, 1991; Presser, 2005; Presser, 2016). As Ugelvik reminds us, the staging of the story is vital for an understanding of it as a performative device (Ugelvik, 2016, p.219). By considering the interview at this localised level, narrative scholars are also then able to say something about the negotiation of power (Presser, 2005).

2.3.1 The epistemological foundations of narrative criminology

Presser (2009) outlines three ways in which narrative has been conceptualised in criminology. These are, narrative as record, narrative as interpretation, and a constitutive view of narrative (Sandberg, 2010, p.451). In the first view, narratives are seen as a direct account of what has happened, a straightforward mapping out of previous events. As exampled in the work of the Chicago School scholars, narratives are understood as a factual retelling, though with space for verifying the 'facts' it contains against other sources. In the second view, it is the actor's subjective interpretation that is valued. Criminality here is understood through the subjective lens of the perpetrator. This approach to narrative

necessitates investigating how people see their world, but the social world still exists as an objectively given entity (Sandberg, 2010, p.451). The second view is usefully conceptualised in Sykes & Matza's, *Techniques of Neutralization* theory*.* The third view comprises the *constitutive view of narrative.* In this view, narrative does not stand outside of experience. It is part of it. Experience is always known and acted upon as it has been interpreted symbolically (Presser, 2009, p.184). And it is here we find the epistemological leanings of narrative criminology.

As Sandberg & Fleetwood (2017, p.368) note, narrative has an ontological quality in that events are experienced and understood narratively, leaving no distinction between experience and interpretation of that experience. There is no "once-and-for-all" story (Presser & Sandberg, 2015, p.3). As past events are being narrated, current experience is being transformed. Following Bruner's (2004) understanding of the reflexive dilemma of the narrator who is also the central figure in his/her narrative, the enterprise of a having a final story of one's own life, "seems a most shaky one" (Bruner, 2004, p.693). As previously outlined, narrative criminology is not motivated by looking for narrative truth. It assumes a poststructuralist position in its principal concern with what stories *do,* rather than what they *reveal* (Presser, 2016, p.139). However, unlike critical criminologists in their eschewing of all cause and effect possibilities (Presser, 2009), NC is invested in making causal claims (Fleetwood, 2016; Presser & Sandberg, 2018; Raitanen, Sandberg, & Oksanen, 2019, Sandberg, 2013). In this way, it situates itself within a postpositivist camp. Though truth is not the goal of the analyst, narrative criminologists still take stories to be "social forces in their own right" (Presser & Sandberg, 2018, p.133). In plain terms, they do not just report past events, they also set the stage for new events.

For narrative analysts then, as we have seen in Maruna's *Making Good*, whether or not research participants are telling the truth is not really important (Presser, 2016; Presser & Sandberg, 2015; Sandberg, 2010). Narrative criminologists have interest in what is being said, whatever the presumed accuracy or inaccuracy (Presser, 2016, p.139). Truth seeking, linked as it is with concerns about the *validity* of data, is thus somewhat antithetical. In keeping with this line of thought, narrative criminologists are therefore skeptical about whether people can ever tell their 'own' stories. Influenced and shaped as they are by the social world from which they emerge, the narrative criminologist doubts narratives can act as emancipatory devices (Presser, 2016, p.143). As such, rather than a vehicle for communicating "suppressed voices" (Presser & Sandberg, 2015, p.2), or

making visible the subjective worlds of certain marginalised groups, narratives are better understood for their value in what they might say about the conventions of the social world.

2.3.2 Taking a psychological view

Narrative Criminology does not stand alone in its contention that narratives might themselves be the antecedent of future action. Coming from the psychological tradition, David Canter and colleagues (Canter, Ioannou, and Youngs, 2009; Goodlad, Ioannou & Hunter, 2019; Ioannou, Canter & Youngs, 2017; Ioannou, Canter, Youngs & Synnott, 2015; Ioannou, Synnott, Lowe, Tzani-Pepelasi, 2018; Spruin, Canter, Youngs & Coulston, 2014; Youngs & Canter, 2011; Youngs & Canter, 2012) have been concerned with understanding narrative analysis through a quantitative lens. This has principally been through their development and use of the Narrative Roles Questionnaire (NRQ).

Canter (1994) was the first to propose the use of narrative to explore criminal behaviour (Ioannou, Canter & Youngs, 2016; Spruin, Canter, Youngs & Coulston (2014). Canter's approach drew on narrative theory in order to demonstrate how offenders' stories might provide a richer understanding of offending than simply dispositional or social theories (Youngs & Canter, 2012, p.290). In line with the approach advocated by Presser and Sandberg, through narrative, motivation and meaning become the intention to act (Youngs & Canter, 2012). Canter et al. have been particularly interested in the self-created narratives that help give shape and significance to actions. This process of embedding the view of the self within a narrative, the "inner narrative" (Canter, 1994), has been argued as assisting in explaining a number of aspects of criminal activity. By understanding the narrative then, it is thought possible to get closer to understanding the action (Youngs & Canter, 2012, p.290).

For Canter and associates, the principle concern is with narrative roles. Canter (1994) claims that offenders see themselves as playing to particular roles when committing a crime. Furthermore, that there will be a dominate role that the criminal will take that relates directly to their overall narrative. It is thus the narrative roles, rather than individual typology, which aligns with offending (Presser & Sandberg, 2019). Developed from a content analysis of interviews with offenders convicted for a variety of offence types, the

NRQ consists of 33 statements[11] (Youngs & Canter, 2012) connected with how those individuals described the experience of committing a recent offence. These statements were then categorised into four themes (Irony, Adventure, Quest and Tragedy) which correlate to four different narrative roles: Victim (the protagonist acts only a consequence of his powerlessness); Revenger (the protagonist is strong and powerful and is seeking a particular impact on another person); Hero (the protagonist acts as a justified response), and Professional (the protagonist demonstrates his strength and expertise) (Youngs & Canter, 2011). The NRQ uses a Likert scale to map offenders' ratings of the extent to which each of the statements described what it was like while they were committing their crime.

Canter and colleagues argue that the results of these studies have consistently shown that offenders have acted out different narrative offence roles while they were offending. Evidence of this been found in a range of studies, including those involving mentally disordered offenders (Spruin, Canter, Youngs & Coulston, 2014), young offenders (Ioannou, Canter, Youngs & Synnott, 2015), psychopathic and mentally disordered offenders, (Goodlad, Ioannou & Hunter, 2019), and interestingly, across different types of crime (Ioannou, Canter, Youngs & Synnott, 2015). In the latter example, different subsets of crimes were found to be associated with different narrative roles e.g. Hero and Professional were found to be associated with property crimes, drug offences, and robbery, whilst Revenger and Victim roles were linked with violent crime, sexual offences, and murder.

The narrative roles theory has recently been developed to include emotions, specifically, the types of emotions that are experienced by an offender whilst committing a broad range of crimes (Goodlad, Ioannou & Hunter, 2019; Ioannou, Canter & Youngs, 2017; Ioannou, Synnott, Lowe & Tzani-Pepelasi, 2018). This evolution of the original theory has been characterised by Ioannou, Canter & Youngs (2017) as the criminal narrative experience (CNE) model. In CNE, criminal narrative roles are extended to include, *Elated* Hero (crime is seen as brave and exciting); *Calm* Professional (crime is a job therefore the offender is calm and relaxed doing it); *Distressed* Revenger (there is a moral right to take revenge); and *Depressed* Victim (the offender does not feel responsibility as the crime was unavoidable) (Ioannou, Canter & Youngs, 2017; Ioannou, Synnott, Lowe & Tzani-Pepelasi,

[11] This became a 36 item scale in later versions e.g. Spruin, Canter, Youngs & Coulston (2014).

2018). This additional perspective, it is argued, demonstrates significance in determining criminal behaviour in that, like with the narrative roles, it has explanatory power. The roles and emotions experienced in the crime direct and inform criminal behaviour, providing a basis for differentiating offenders and their patterns of behaviour.

Like Presser, Sandberg and co., Canter and colleagues also appear unconcerned with truth. Or more accurately said, they are unconcerned with truth in terms of its role as a foundation to their primary research tool. In the construction of the NRQ, Youngs & Canter (2012) note that the statements used in its development were based on "postoffence verbalizations", admitting they may then be distorted by memory or "postoffence developments" (p.296). However, defending the use of a phenomenologically informed approach (as was used in the study for which the NRQ was developed), they argue that the subjective perception should be taken at face value:

> *It does not have to be believed as objective fact but can be taken to indicate the constructs and related perspectives the individual brings to the issues at hand. It shows how they wish to be seen…We accept that all the narratives we observe in personal accounts have an element of justification, but we are exploring the particular form of the justification.*
>
> (Youngs & Canter, 2012, p.296)

As Ioannou, Synott, Lowe & Tzani-Pepelasi (2018, p.4104) add, this lack of reliance on the 'true' account allows for a greater degree of freedom in the exploration of experience, emotions and narrative roles. The authors note the richness of insight that can be gained through the self-reports of offenders (ibid). By detangling ourselves from the anchor of factual accuracy, the authors suggest, new understanding might be afforded.
There is much to taken away from the approaches described here. In Maruna's *Making Good*, the value of a phenomenologically informed analysis was demonstrated in considering what we might learn from offenders' life-stories. Of particular interest is Maruna's rumination about the motivating force of assuming certain narrative identities. In the work of Presser, Sandberg and colleagues, a theoretically and methodologically driven *narrative criminology* was described. Narratives were argued as being antecedents to action, with the analytic process showing the value of a constructionist approach which understands narratives as a social product hewed from a social world. Finally, and in drawing clear parallels with the work of Presser, Sandberg and co., Canter, Ioannou, et al. argue how certain roles are being played out as an offence is being committed. In line with the principles of NC, (though here through a psychological, quantitative lens), the narrative

roles theory, along with the later criminal narrative experience (CNE) model, also seeks to makes causal claims. In this case though, through an argument that the narrative investments offenders have in certain roles are useful predictors of future criminal action. But what value might these important theoretical and methodical approaches have in exploring the research questions of this thesis?

2.4 Exploring the narrated lives of young adult offenders

It is important to now return to the original purpose of this chapter in its aim to find a more useful way of exploring the constructed worlds of 18-24 year olds in the CJS. As stated in the introduction, this thesis has a number of specific research questions. It is helpful at this point to revisit them. Firstly, a question is asked about how young adults in the criminal justice system explain and make sense of their lives. The question is interested is in what types of things these young adults talk about, and how they order and rationalise the twists and turns of their life history. Secondly, there is the question of the identities that are constructed within these life-stories. This question is concerned with how these young adults present themselves, and what stories they are drawing on to support and uphold these particular identities. Thirdly, and here we invoke the social, this thesis questions to what extent these stories and storied identities might have been influenced and shaped by the social world in which they were produced. For example, what *types* of stories are being told (thinking both about what discourses are being drawn on, and what discourses are even available), and *why* are they being told (considering, for example, the effect of audience and circumstance)? In essence, what are the effects of societal power? And fourthly, what implications might this have for criminal justice policy and practice? What might we learn about what young adults say about themselves, compared with what is institutionally believed about them? In tackling these questions, the importance of a narrative approach is not in question. Narrative, as has been discussed earlier in this chapter, offers much by way of exploring the lived experiences of individuals and groups. But what is particularly useful about a narrative criminology perspective?

2.4.1 The value of a theoretical narrative criminology

Narrative criminology, as a theoretical framework, provides an important structure with which to understand how talk might translate into action. For this research, the interest is in what YAO say about their lives, how they construct narrative selves, and thus from an NC perspective, how those selves might suggest an intent to act from that position.

YAO policy and practice is concerned with understanding who the YAO is, what his/her needs are, and how those needs might best be met. Following this is the conclusion that, if those needs are *not* met, the YAO will continue to act in certain (anti-social and criminal) ways. But, of course, this process relies on the adherence to a particular set of assumptions about this group. For example, that they are chaotic, that they have poor thinking skills, that they struggle educationally, that they are disorganised, that they perhaps lack emotional intelligence, or (interestingly) that they are not invested in criminality per se, but lack the resources — both psychologically and sociologically — with which to be able to take themselves out of it. YAO services have been built on these beliefs. However, it is important to keep in mind that, though this set of beliefs about the YAO might be true, equally they may not. Or, they may apply to some but not others. The question is, how do we know? And (as has been explored in chapter 1), if we don't, are we developing and implementing programmes and interventions that hinder rather than help?

Returning then to what value the theoretical approach of NC can have. Echoing the realist understandings in policy and practice which suggest that meeting YAO's needs might influence (pro-social) future behaviour, there appears to be a rather perfect fit here for the NC approach. In exploring the narratives of YAO for where their investments are (in being seen in this way or that), we might be in a better place to offer insights into what their future actions might be. For example, in adhering to the pro-social, strengths-based approaches of YAO criminal justice initiatives. Importantly though, we might also see where there is a *disconnect*. The implicit expectation of YAO services is that the YAO adheres to the model of the needful, vulnerable individual as set out in research and policy. But what if they don't? And, moreover, what if their narrative investments, as with Maruna's persisters, suggests an interest in continuing in their criminal endeavours? Though it can't of course offer complete certainty, an NC perspective can certainly help in providing more clarity.

2.4.2 Narrative criminology as a methodological approach

Exploring how individuals explain and makes sense of their lives offers a number of methodological options. One of these is to take a phenomenological approach. Indeed, if we are interested in studying the subjective experience of lives lived, a phenomenological methodology might be a wise choice, as it was for Maruna with his "phenomenology of deviance" (Maruna, 2001, p.8). However, though a phenomenological approach can be invaluable in terms of giving insight into an individual's subjective world, it can also be rather problematic. Firstly, with regard to the role the researcher plays in the research process. The phenomenology of Husserl supposes that the researcher is able to set aside his/her own world view to see through the eyes of the other, to perceive 'things in their appearing'. This is something Husserl referred to as epoché (1970), or 'bracketing'. Husserl suggested it was possible to *transcend* presuppositions and biases (Willig, 2008, p.53), putting to one side the "taken-for-granted" world in order to concentrate on our perception of that world (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p.13). Bracketing is thus seen to mitigate the potential unwarranted effects of unacknowledged preconceptions related to the research (Band-Winterstein, Doron & Naim, 2014, p534). The problem is, is this even possible?

Paul Ricoeur and Hans-Georg Gadamer believe not. Both Ricoeur and Gadamer have criticised this aspect of phenomenology suggesting that we always speak from somewhere. We are a product of our experience, and accordingly we bring those experiences to our perceptions of the world. Gadamer (2004, p.271), talks of the responsibilities of the analyst to "remain open" to the meanings of the other (person or text), yet acknowledges too that the analyst will have "fore-meanings and prejudices" about the world. He suggests the endeavour for the analyst is to remain cognisant of these, so as not to infer their own meaning on to the meaning of the other.

> *But this openness always includes our situating the other meaning in relation to the whole of our own meanings or ourselves in relation to it… The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings.*
>
> (Gadamer, 2004, p.271)

Rather than assume a position of transcendence, where the analyst is simply able to comprehend the subjective world of the other from the position of the *tabula rasa,*

Gadamer suggests it is in the awareness of our biases that a more honest interpretation is produced.

Secondly, though content and meaning are the goals of phenomenology, they bypass the way that people's subjective worlds are politically, socially and ideologically constructed. Though understanding and respecting the lived experience of the participant is important, so too is examining what impact the political and social might have on it (Langdridge, 2008, p.136). As discourse analysts have long explained, it is through discourse that objects and things are constructed, and meanings negotiated (Holt, 2009; 2011). The world is created and understood intersubjectively. As Gadamer and Ricoeur contend, we gain knowledge through our engagement with discourse. So, whilst a phenomenological analysis might tell us about an individual's subjective world, an additional critical position might offer an insight into how that subjective world came to be.

Here again the NC perspective, with its focus on the value of a social-constructionist approach to analysis, delivers. Narratives are a social product. They comprise both the individual's experience of the social world, *and* its construction in a social setting (between narrator and listener). By understanding the imprint of the social world, we might better understand *why* young adult offenders tell the stories they do.

Conclusion

'Truth' is a highly contestable concept, and especially in the context of story-telling. It is fluid (having the capacity to evolve from embellishment or fabrication to absolute fact). It is changeable (a truth for us at one point in our lives might become a falsehood later on), and it is dependent (what is true for one might not be so for another). Truth is also historically relevant, and culturally specific. Yet despite the intense fragility of this essentialist notion, through the lens of criminal justice, truth remains the ultimate goal. The challenge, as this chapter has articulated, is finding a means with which to address this when it comes to exploring the lives of young adult men in the criminal justice system.

To at least begin to understand the lived realities of others, an approach is needed which backseats assumptions about what is and isn't valid, and what does and does not comprise a factually accurate account. Instead, the focus must be on the subjective lens of the individual. How do *they* explain, navigate and make sense of their world? What do *they* see as the valuable story to tell? However, though such a (phenomenological) approach might add much to understanding of the lived experiences of others, it is not without its problems. As this chapter has clearly argued, we cannot disentangle ourselves from our own experiences and beliefs about the world. Our analytic attention is always drawn in certain directions due to what we have previously been exposed to. As such, we run the risk of exploring the lives of others in rather limited, reductive or biased ways.

In addressing these matters, this chapter has considered what the methodological and theoretical approach of narrative criminology might offer. Rather than pursue problematic quests for narrative 'truth', or become entrapped in exploring the lived experiences of others from a particular vantage point, this chapter has argued for the value of NC in offering a more critical perspective. Specifically, NC has been advocated for its ability to enable consideration of not just *what* people say but *why* they might say it. Most importantly, and here hewing to a postpositivist view, this chapter has also set out what the NC approach might offer in terms of identifying intended future action. This is an essential perspective when considering what value this research might have to the wider criminal justice system.

The next chapter therefore considers the practical application of the narrative criminology approach, describing how it was used in exploring the narrated lives of 10 young adult men in the criminal justice system.

Chapter 3: Methodology and methods

The previous chapter argued for the importance of a narrative approach, in particular drawing from the theoretical and methodological ideas encapsulated in the relatively new discipline of narrative criminology. The chapter set out how a phenomenologically informed, yet commensurately critical approach, as reflected in the tenets of narrative criminology, might usefully be employed in a research project exploring the lived experiences of young adult men in the criminal justice system. In the following chapter, these ideas are practically applied.

This chapter begins by explaining who took part in the research, and how they were recruited, paying particular attention to ethical detail. It then moves on to an in-depth account of the qualitative research methods used to explore the topic of this thesis. Here, the work of key researchers in the fields of biographic narrative interviewing and graphic elicitation are drawn on to explain how their methods were used and adapted to shape an individualised methodological approach. A full account of the data collection process then takes places, again addressing important ethical matters. The chapter then concludes with an account of a three-stage analytical approach, faithful to the principles of narrative criminology.

3.1 Sample

3.1.1 Quantitative demographics

The sample comprised of 10 males aged between 19 and 24, with a mix of ethnicities as indicated by the participants themselves. Six identified as White-British; two Black Caribbean; one White/Black Caribbean; and one Bangladeshi. Three of the group were from London, three were from Worcestershire, and four were from Shropshire. With regard to religion, seven indicated having no religion, two identified as Christian and one identified as Muslim. Finally, all but one stated they had no disability. For the participant that declared they did have a disability, it was self-diagnosed as dyslexia (i.e. this had not been determined through official channels).

Each participant was, at the time of interview, involved with the CJS at a probationary level. Nine of the group had received a custodial sentence, with each having been released from prison between three weeks and nine months earlier. The participants were all categorised as medium to high risk of serious harm (according to probation risk assessments), with six of them classified as a Prolific and Priority Offenders (PPOs). The range of offence types for the participants included drug dealing, burglary, grievous bodily harm, armed robbery and attempted murder, though many of them had been convicted for multiple offences.

3.1.2 A note on gender

The research described here focuses specifically on the lived experiences of just young adult males. This was deliberate and intended to reflect the implicit gendering of wider criminal justice policy and practice, and specifically policy and practice related to young adult offenders.

Empiricist feminist theorists have been arguing since the 1970s that the male experience of the criminal justice system is considered 'the norm'. Policy and practice in relation to criminal justice issues (reducing reoffending strategy; drug and alcohol addiction; conditions in prison; resettlement processes etc.) is principally aimed at younger and older males. Indeed, it only takes a brief look at the multiple examples of research and policy highlighting the unique and additional challenges faced by women in the criminal justice system to evidence the political recognition of this difference (Allen, 2016; Guiney & Earle, 2017; Gullberg, 2017; Minson, Nadin & Earle, 2015; Office for National Statistics, 2016; Osterman and Masson, 2016; Prison Reform Trust, 2016; 2017). So why perpetuate this gendered focus then? As this research seeks to critically question the way in which UK criminal justice policy unconsciously embeds itself in the narratives of young adult lives, a focus on the group in which it is principally aimed seemed essential. Though a specific focus on how young adult women in the criminal justice system explain and make sense of their lives (and subsequently how they internalise criminal justice agendas) is undeniably important, it is perhaps better located in research exploring the impact of policy aimed specifically at young adult women.

3.1.3 Recruitment

Participants were recruited via three YAO organisations[12] – one based in London, one in Shropshire and one in Worcestershire. These organisations were specifically approached because of an existing relationship I had with them in my previous work as a professional researcher. The selection of participants was not strategic, in that there was no specific sampling frame. Though participants needed to have three common characteristics, (age, gender and be currently under probation supervision), the recruitment was entirely opportunistic. Indeed, any demographic variations, aside from age, gender and offending status, were by chance and not design.

Recruitment comprised an initial contact with the organisations to ascertain if it would be possible to access potential participants through them. When agreement was reached in principle, a pack of information was sent through to the organisations including, 1) an outline of the research, 2) a summary detailing the required involvement from the participating organisations, 3) ten invitation letters and participant consent forms for potential participants (see Appendix C and D) and 4) a signed declaration from the University of Portsmouth Ethics Committee giving a favourable opinion to the proposed research project (see Appendix A). An 'opt-in' method was then used to recruit participants to the study. The organisations were asked to pass on the invitation letters and research summaries to any young adults they were working with, and additionally give a brief verbal explanation of the research and what their involvement would be. The extra measure of the verbal explanation was to account for any reading or comprehension issues amongst prospective participants. Finally, those interested in participating identified themselves to a relevant key worker, and names and details were then emailed on to me. In this way, I was able to distance myself from the selection process.

3.1.4 Ethical recruitment: Addressing issues of power

As the young men in my study were being recruited via these YAO services, there was a risk that they might feel obligated to take part in the research. To help mitigate this, I made sure that in negotiating access, I impressed on their key workers the importance of

[12] The names of the YAO organisations have been omitted so as to protect the identity of the young men who participated in this research. See section 3.4.1 for further details on the anonymisation process.

communicating that participation was completely voluntary. This I raised first through my initial email contact. I then followed this up when I sent out my written document. I then reiterated this again during the last stages of telephone communication. The final stage was in confirming my permission to visit the YAO service, and in getting the information of the young men who had agreed to take part in the study. Upon meeting the young men, I again underlined the voluntary nature of their participation. This was done before seeking their consent to participate (the process of which is described in section 3.4 of this chapter).

3.2 Methods

In seeking to answer the research questions outlined earlier in this chapter, I employed two primary research methods. These were 1) biographical narrative interviews and 2) a drawing task. Each method will be described in turn next.

3.2.1 The biographical narrative interview approach

The biographical narrative interview was chosen for its benefits in eliciting rich narratives. The approach is based firmly on the premise that we come to understand and give meaning to our lives through story (Trahar, 2009, para.1). Different from the semi-structured interview (which aims to investigate an individual's experiences of a specific phenomenon), the biographical narrative interview invites the participant to recollect the broad, personal memories of their life. As Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou (2008, p.2) suggest, personal narratives "carry traces of human lives that we want to understand". We can, to an extent, perceive a person through their stories. But narrative inquiry is more than just the uncritical gathering of stories. Narrative researchers must also attend to the mechanics and purpose of story-telling i.e. the ways in which a story is constructed, for whom and why, as well as the "cultural discourses" that it draws upon (Trahar, 2009, para. 1.). Reflecting the concerns of narrative criminology, the biographical narrative interview is interested in not only what stories people tell, but why those stories are being told.

The decision to utilise a biographical narrative interview in my own research was crucial for a number of reasons. Firstly, I wanted my interviewees to tell their stories in their own way. As Vajda (2007) explains, the narrative biographic interview places emphasis on the participant's life story as narrated by them. The wording and structuring of the narrative, as well as the choice of what information to include/exclude, is left exclusively to the interviewee (Vajda, 2007, p.90). As is often the problem in traditional semi-structured interviewing, the interviewer sets the agenda and remains principally in control of what information is produced (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; Hollway & Jefferson 2008). The narrative interview, by contrast, is open to development and change depending on the narrator's experiences (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008, p.302). As much I was able to, I wanted the young men to have control over what stories they told and the way in which they told them. Though I concur with Presser in her doubt of the guaranteed emancipatory qualities of narrative (Presser, 2016), this approach felt a tentative step towards it. Secondly, I was interested in better understanding how the young men used stories to shape their 'subjective world' (Kalus, 2016). Bruner (1986) talks of narrative-knowing, how we use stories to make sense of events and experiences. We come to know the world through and shape our lives after stories (Presser, 2009, p.178). I was interested to see what narratives the young men drew on, and what this might reveal about their experience of the social world. Thirdly, I wanted to move away from research which foregrounded the researcher's world. My past experience as a social researcher often saw me interviewing others using the language of the institutions I was affiliated with. This was very much the case in my work with those within the CJS. My professional world always took priority over that of the participant. Miller and Glassner (2004, p.134) in their research exploring young women's experiences of being in gangs, talk about the way narratives will naturally draw on "culturally available resources". They refer here to Richardson's (1990) notion that cultural participation involves participation in the narratives of that culture, including understandings of stock meanings, and their relationships to each other (Richardson, 1990, p.24). In line with the social-constructionist understandings of narrative criminology, the focus on a culturally grounded interview was felt to be crucial.

The specific style of narrative biographic interview used in this research was adapted from two highly detailed narrative inquiry methods, Wengraf's (2001) Biographical Narrative Interpretative Method (BNIM), and Hollway & Jefferson's (2000) Free-Association Narrative Interviewing (FANI). Though there are minor differences in how each executes their specific approach (e.g. single or multiple questions to induce talk; presence of

interviewer interruptions; level of interview structure etc.), fundamentally, both are concerned with supporting and eliciting story-telling, both encourage factual remembering whilst simultaneously avoiding *why* questions (a technique that discourages the participant from intellectualising or self-analysing), and both utilise free-association talk to drive the narratives. The latter holds particular importance as it is through observing the free-associations made during a narrative telling that the *gestalt* might appear (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000; Wengraf, 2001).

I drew first on Wengraf's SQUIN method (Single Question aimed at Inducing Narrative). The SQUIN approach comprises a single question designed to elicit the life-story of the informant as he/she chooses to tell it (Wengraf, 2001). However, given my interest in utilising graphic elicitation as a method (see next section), rather than a single question, I began with a single instruction, “Draw your life”. From that point onwards, I used the participants’ drawings to elicit narratives, asking questions such as, “Can you tell me what is happening in this picture?” or “What have you drawn here?”. In line with the approach advocated by both Wengraf and Hollway & Jefferson, I followed the narrative order of the participants. I only asked factual questions, and avoided *why* questions[13]. I also avoided interrupting participants, and left long pauses after their answers to encourage further detail/elaboration in their stories. There were no pre-designed questions. Every part of the interview was centred around the topics that each participant chose to discuss. Finally, I wrote detailed field notes, a practice suggested by Wengraf & Chamberlayne (2005, p.24). These notes documented how I felt the interview had gone, what my impressions were of the participants and anything else notable that occurred to me at the time that I felt might impact on my later analysis.

However, though highly influenced by these innovative narrative inquiry styles, my own research departs from the work of Wengraf and Hollway & Jefferson in two important ways. The first departure comprises the number of interviews undertaken with each participant. Both Wengraf and Hollway & Jefferson advocate conducting multiple interviews with each person, though the reasons for this differ slightly. With Wengraf’s BNIM, interviews are conducted in two, sometimes three stages. The first opens with a

[13] I state that I avoided ‘why?’ questions rather than omitted to ask any, as some emerged as a habit of past practice. The ‘why?’ questions I used though were mainly ones that were seeking more information “why did you go there/do that?”, rather than ones looking for self-reflection and self-analysis e.g. “why do you think you went there/did that”.

broad question aimed at inducing personal narrative. The second involves narrative-pointed questions relating to topics already addressed and in the order they were originally raised - a technique allowing for the gestalt to be maintained (Buckner, 2005). The third - an optional stage - allows for further questions to clarify what the interviewee has already spoken about but not as a means to elicit new narratives. Hollway & Jefferson's FANI method has similar goals in eliciting initial narratives and then following up on these in the order set out by the participant in the first interview. The second interview, however, acts also as a method to interrogate those stories looking for inconsistencies, elisions and contradictions (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; Hollway & Jefferson, 2008). This process in turn provides (further) evidence of the 'defended subject', a psychoanalytic term denoting the unconscious defence against the threat of anxiety. For my own research, I elected to only interview each participant once. My reason for this was in the consideration of what value multi-stage interviews would have when viewed from my epistemological position. For Wengraf and Hollway & Jefferson, such methods are tools to access a truth of sorts, a concrete, albeit critical reality. Multiple interviews in this context make sense as a coherent, final reading is being sought. The analyst must be relatively sure of his/her conclusions. My research, in line with my epistemology, believes reality resides in the subjective perceptions of the individual. There is therefore never a unified truth as reality appears differently to each perceiver. In addition, from a critical position the story being told is just one of a multitude of possible stories, all of which are affected by time, place and culture, and moreover by the circumstances of their production (i.e. the research interview itself). The purpose of multiple interviews was therefore unnecessary as each narrative was examined as something all and of its own, and understood as a product of the participant's uniquely subjective experience.

The second departure is principally related to the FANI method of Hollway & Jefferson (although it is also relevant to some users of Wengraf's BNIM method)[14], and concerns the psychoanalytic nature of the interview. For Hollway & Jefferson, this style of interviewing mimics the psychodynamic practices of the psychotherapist. The goal of the interview, as in the psychoanalyst's room, is to reveal the hidden truths that reside in the participant's unconscious mind. The interviewer must listen for the contradictions and inconsistencies of the narrative that expose the participant's defences against anxiety. However, this performativity of psychotherapy in social research has been widely criticised (Burman,

[14] The use of psychoanalytic techniques is not essential in the BNIM method as it is in the FANI method, but it is practiced amongst a minority of those that use BNIM (Wengraf included).

2008; Wetherell, 2005; Frosh, 2003; Frosh & Baraitser, 2008; Hook, 2008), even by those sympathetic to the role psychoanalysis can play in such research (Frosh, 2003; Frosh & Barrister, 2008; Hook, 2008; Saville-Young & Frosh, 2010). As Garfield, Revey & Kotecha (2010, p.160), proponents of this particular psychoanalytic approach, outline, "[t]he FANI method requires not only interview skills on the part of the researcher but also therapeutic skills". However, the obvious question here is, how ethical is this process? Scholars sympathetic to this approach have attempted to defend it by making claims that sociologists "probably often" produce analyses incongruent with their subjects' own self-identifications (Roseneil, 2006, p.865), or suggesting deception is only unethical if the participant experiences "discomfort, anger or objections" because of it (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p89), however such justifications feel rather unsubstantial. The participant might knowingly consent to the interview, but they are not knowingly consenting to the subsequent psychoanalytic profiling. Hook (2008, p.399) argues of the potential dangers of practicing psychoanalytic work outside of the controlled and supervised environment of the clinic. Any form of psychoanalysis, Hook contends, needs supervision, an established clinical technique, a strict ethical code and the "contextualization" of a detailed and ongoing account of a life history. Halperin (2007) too warns of this type of psychoanalytically informed thinking, with reference to gay men and the tendency in such work to produce a pathologically gay male subject. Rather than the interview acting as a pseudo-psychoanalytic session then, the research conducted here comprised a phenomenologically informed approach, which placed me as 'interested outsider' seeking to understand the subjective world of the participant.

3.2.2 The drawing task

Complimenting this detailed biographic narrative approach, a simple drawing task was also used. The task involved the participant being asked to "draw your life", and to interpret that request in whatever way they chose.

Visual methods such as photographs, drawings, graphics, videography, tables and diagrams, films, art, even eye-coding (Olk & Kappas, 2011) have been widely used to collect data in a number of fields. They can be a valuable tool in both supporting and leading data collection. Various researchers have contended that visual methods can make the research experience more engaging and empowering for the participant

(Godden, 2017; Lewis, 2016), more enjoyable for the participant (Schulze, 2017; Vindrola-Padros, Martins, Coyne, Bryan & Gibson, 2016), and they can often facilitate a better communication flow between participant and researcher (Liebenberg, 2009; Vindrola-Padros, Martins, Coyne, Bryan & Gibson, 2016). Indeed, visual methods are most commonly seen amongst those working within participatory research (D'Amico, Denov, Khan, Linds & Akesson, 2016; Godden, 2017; Lewis, 2016; Vindrola-Padros, Martins, Coyne, Bryan & Gibson, 2016). Most significant to my research, visual methods have also shown to be highly beneficial when conducting research into people's lived experience (Bagnoli, 2009; Banks, 2001; Sheridan, Chamberlain, and Dupuis, 2011; Twine, 2016).

Within my own research, I saw a role for visual methods in opening up what in many ways felt a rather dry, one size-fits-all, approach to qualitative research. Twine (2016, p.969), for example, talks of the critical role visual literacy (as she terms it) has played in her research into racial literary. In explaining how she uses pictures to explore the lived experiences of parents of mixed-race children, she underlines how central sight is to how most people interpret and make sense of the world. Yet, she claims, traditional sociology (and, of course, other related disciplines) so often overlooks it. Additionally, Schulze (2017), discusses the value of using graphic elicitation in her research exploring the learning progress of students in higher education. Schulze asked her participants (21 students, 11 who had achieved well in their degrees and 10 that had achieved less well) to create tables and 'relational maps' (Bagnoli, 2009; Schulze, 2017) to explore their learning experience. In her conclusions, Schulze talks of how the use of graphic elicitation improved participant reflection, how it helped avoid the awkwardness of the interview situation, and how it encouraged bonding between herself and the participants. Importantly, and particularly key to my own research, Schulze highlighted how the use of such a method was instrumental in rebalancing status inequalities. As she explains it, the authority was with the participants. The visual approach allowed her participants "greater freedom, voice and power" (p.73).

The choice to use specifically graphic elicitation (as opposed to any other visual method) came from an interest in the way it could be produced and utilised immediately. I wanted something that participants could create and discuss *within* the research interview so that, aligned with the thinking around free-association talk, narratives would emerge naturally, in the order conceived by the participant, and drawing on topics identified by the participant. In addition, drawings have creative flexibility. They can comprise timelines, maps, graphs,

stickmen, objects, symbols, animations, sketches, essentially anything that can be achieved through using a pen and paper. I wanted to offer the young men as broad a choice as possible in what they could produce from the task.

Finally, and of particular relevance to this doctoral research, is the role that visual methods can play in conducting research with offenders. Holt & Pamment (2011) in a paper commenting on the challenges that can be faced when interviewing young offenders, describe their development of the 'assisted questionnaire', a visual tool (as opposed to a quantitative method) designed to promote longer and richer interviews. Young offenders, the authors argue, are highly familiar with the formality of the interview situation often having experienced them through their contact with police, Youth Offending Team (YOT) workers, social workers and numerous official others. As such, they can be perceived as highly threatening (p.126). The authors maintain that in using an alternate visual method such as the assisted questionnaire, tensions can be alleviated through minimising the intensity and intimidation (p.128) produced by the more traditional face-to-face interviews. Moreover, Lewis (2016) describes using visual methods in her participatory doctoral research exploring therapeutic correctional relationships. Assisted by the offenders who were also the focus of her research, Lewis (2014, 2016) developed a visual technique of plotting offenders' narratives using 'mind maps' (Lewis, 2016, p.10). Visual methods, Lewis argues, are invaluable in the way that they act as a shared point of focus, reducing the pressure faced by the participant. They also assist memory, helping the participant to recall key life events. *And* they allow for a deeper exploration into experiences. Lewis, like Schulze, also draws particular attention to the role visual methods have in redressing power differentials. Indeed, as explored in the previous chapter, power issues in work with offenders can be a particular barrier to the elicitation of rich and in-depth data.

3.2.3 Limitations of the methods

In order to provide a more informed reading of the following analytic chapters, the limitations of these methods are also considered. In this way, they can be taken into account whilst navigating the nuances of the analysis.

The biographical narrative interview: Though the idea behind the unstructured, single question narrative approach worked very well, there were aspects of the analysis which

would have benefitted from further information drawn from the young men's narratives. Specifically, it would have been good to get a measure of how the young men understood and experienced the YAO services. Though this information was produced by a natural extension of talking about their lives, often it was reduced to comparisons made with other services, or subsumed into their wider stories of desistance. The decision to not do this originally was, firstly, that I wanted the young men to talk about whatever they wanted to *and* in whatever way they wanted to do it, and secondly, that I did not want it to end up being an evaluation of that service. That was, expressly, not what this research was about. However, a specific question at some point in the interview might have produced additional data, which may have enhanced that part of this research. For example, in understanding how the young men saw YAO services as different from other criminal justice services, and how their 'young adulthood' was upheld through the ways in which the YAO service staff worked with them.

The drawing task: Though the task operated effectively as a tool with which to provoke, scaffold and expand narratives, there were a number of issues that emerged around power dynamics. As will be explored in chapter 6, though some of the young men really seemed to enjoy the task, others were wary and even resistant to it. Indeed, though it has been continually argued in the literature that visual methods such as these are often empowering given the limiting nature of language, and the liberating effects of communicating in non-language forms, there were difficulties in getting some of the young men to feel comfortable in undertaking the task. As noted by Galman (2009, p.203), such methods have the power to produce feelings of vulnerability and anxiety, and can be interpreted as something only for children. For this group of young men, all on the cusp of adulthood, the child-like nature of the task may well have been reason for their resistance to it. This seemed especially the case for those who placed their adult status as a highly valued part of their identity, and subsequently saw a need to distance themselves from things and situations which threatened that. Moreover, such approaches may have additional implications when it comes to the powerful position assumed by the criminal justice researcher. Given 'the offender' has often spent a considerable amount of time traversing through the structures and systems of a society which has sought to assess, evaluate and regulate them, there may be an additional level of resistance when it comes to tasks which hint at further pathology. Again, as will be explored in chapter 6, this seemed to be the case with several of the young men in this study.

3.3 Pilot Study

Due to the novelty of the methods[15], it was essential to conduct a pilot study to ensure quality and rigour in my later interviews with the young men. Firstly, I wanted to assess how effectively the data collection materials worked in a real research setting. I asked questions of myself throughout the process such as, does the single opening question and uninterrupted dialogue approach encourage useful and detailed narratives? Does the drawing task work as a related exercise? And from an evaluative point of view, what are the potential problems and how can they be overcome? Secondly, I was keen to practice using what was a very different interviewing approach for me. Having conducted only semi-structured interviews and focus groups over my research career, the narrative biographic interview, with all its stylistic idiosyncrasies, was completely novel. I wanted to prepare myself for the challenges it might throw up.

The data collection for the pilot study took place in January 2012. The participants comprised two young women - a 25 year old white female and a 18 year old white female. Other than age group, the pilot study participants were not matched in any way to the characteristics of the main study participants. Matching was not felt necessary given the goal of this process was to test the interview method and the viability of the drawing task, not to critique the ways in which different participants responded to the two research methods.

The interviews took place in the participants' homes at a time convenient for each. The first interview took 55 minutes and the second 1 hour and 15 minutes, both including time spent on the drawing task. Before commencing each interview, I had each participant sign a consent form. I kept one copy for myself and gave the other to them as I later did with the main study participants. I also explained what the study was about, the ethics around their involvement (confidentiality, anonymity, right to withdraw etc) and the specific role their interviews would play in the wider research. I then sought consent as to whether it was okay for me to digitally record the interview. After each interview came to a natural close, we mutually agreed to turn the tape off. I then, as with all research participants, again explained what they had taken part in and what would happen to their data after the

[15] This was the first time I had used this style of biographic narrative interviewing and the first time I had used drawings as a data elicitation method. However, the newness is also in part referring to the methods themselves, with both only coming in to common use in the last 10-15 years.

study completed. As the data for the pilot study was not to be used in the main research, I did not offer a retraction of information timeframe as I did with the main study participants. The interviews completed with me informing them to contact me if they had any further questions or concerns about their involvement.

The ethics involved in the pilot study were different in part from that of the main study, and are therefore important to mention here. The pilot interviews were undertaken with two relatives of a personal friend, and were also personally known to me. This obviously raised the issue of role conflict in that I was operating as both researcher *and* family friend. This was addressed from the outset as I acknowledged to both participants that I would not refer to any topics or raise any issues of which I had prior knowledge. I also would not acknowledge topics where we shared a common history. For example, one of the young women was my friend's daughter and she was well aware I knew much about her life already. When she referred to parts of her life history that she knew I was familiar with, she talked about it purely from her perspective and I only responded to it purely from her perspective. The process was imperfect in that occasionally things were said that confirmed our shared history (e.g. when certain topics were met with an indicator that I would remember them too) but it did not in any way affect the elicitation of narratives[16], which was the point of the exercise.

Three key points emerged from the pilot study. First, my tendency to ask *why* questions (the product of a career encouraging participants to be self-reflective and self-analysing). Second, was the respondents' suspicion of the drawing task (one participant seeing it as a psychoanalytical tool, and subsequently feeling guarded because of it). Third, my natural instinct to fill the silences in the interviews, something which potentially prevented participants from telling stories in their own space and time. As a result, in the main study I allowed participants to provide uninterrupted, factual narrative accounts, which did not require them to be self-analytical. In addition, I made an extra effort to explain the drawing task as a tool to drive and support narratives, and not as a means to make psychological assessments.

[16] Being known to the participants may have affected what stories were told to me, indeed this is likely to be the case, but the purpose of the exercise was to see whether narratives could generally be elicited using this method. In that regard, this was a successful endeavour.

3.4 Data collection

The data collection for this study took place in March 2012. All interviews were held in the locations where the young adult offender support services operated. For the London participants, this was in a local café where the young men carried out their work experience and met for their mentoring sessions with their assigned YAO worker. For the Shropshire and Worcester participants, it was in the offices of the YAO organisation they were attached to. Each interview lasted between 49 minutes and 85 minutes (excluding the time before and after the recorded part of the interview).

3.4.1 Conducting ethical research

The opening activity was to attend to important ethical issues. Firstly, informed consent was sought. This I did by reading through the information sheet to the participants (see Appendix D). Though the information had already been provided previously by the YAO organisations as part of the recruitment process, I wanted to ensure the young men were fully aware, both of what the research was about *and* what their participation involved. By reading the information out to them, and allowing time for their questions and any further clarification needs, potential issues with reading and comprehension difficulty were addressed. In all interviews, I made sure to explain the research clearly and simply. I also checked for understanding after my explanations, asking questions about what they had understood, and if they knew what certain terms meant. For example, I double checked their understanding of the term 'informed consent'. At this point, I also clearly explained what would be done with the information they provided. I explained my interest was part of my university studies, and that though the data from the study was mainly confidential, aspects of the data I collected might be read or discussed by others, for example by my university supervisors. I then clarified that all data would be stored on encrypted files and accessible only by myself. At this point, I also underlined their rights. For example, I told participants of their right to withdraw from participating in the research (being able to stop or leave the interview at any point), their right to access their interview data in the future (here I gave my university email, so that they were always able to contact me), and their right to withdraw any data. On the latter point, I gave a period of 24 hours for them to get in touch with me if they had a change of heart. They had the option to contact me by email,

by phone, or via their key worker at the YAO organisation. As part of this ethical approach, I also discussed the issue of anonymity with the young men. As I was going to be exploring their life stories in detail, it was acknowledged that they might be identifiable through my analysis. To counter this, three things were agreed. Firstly, that the YAO services they were attached to would be anonymised. Secondly, that any names or places would be removed. And thirdly, that pseudonyms would be used to further protect their identities. In addition, it was agreed that the specific crimes for which the young men were convicted of would be generalised, especially when it came to any crimes that had appeared in the media (this applied to 4 of the 10 young men). When all relevant ethical issues had been covered, I asked them to sign a consent form (see Appendix E for details of the consent form). I then took a copy and gave them a copy too for their own records.

A word is also needed here about power, specifically, my position and role as researcher in asking these young men to talk about their lives. Though participation was voluntary, it didn't change the fact that as the researcher, I carried certain institutional power. This power was imbued through both the criminal justice system, (in granting me permission to access the young men), and the estate of higher education (in the badge of university ethical approval I carried with me. I came with the power of the 'right' to access knowledge). Fleetwood (2015, p.374) talks of power in her interviews with women who had experiences with drug-trafficking. She notes of being acutely aware that such storytelling is underpinned by inequalities of power and voice, typically in that there was only space for brief discussions. However, she also suggests that ethnographic research has great potential for challenging power inequalities (ibid). In her case, long-term presence (in the jails where she was collecting her data) made possible,

> *collaborative reflections about the conditions of storytelling in prison, as well as space to tell/listen to stories that were not institutionally supported, for example, the pleasures of deviance.*
>
> (Fleetwood, 2015, p.374)

Though my interviews did not see my long-term placement within the YAO services, the freedom with which the young men had to talk about their lives, and choosing any topics they wanted to explore, appeared to be an enjoyable experience for them. Echoing Fleetwood, the experience gave the young men chance to tell stories which were not "institutionally supported", and therefore did not risk carrying institutional penalties.

3.4.2 Collecting the data

Once the ethical issues had been discussed and agreed, I moved on the main data collection phase. I began by placing a piece of A3 paper and felt-tip pens in front of the participant and gave them a single directive — “draw your life”. Of the ten respondents, nine engaged with the task with one declining to acknowledge it, preferring instead to proceed directly into his narrative. For the nine who undertook the task, the drawings formed the entry point to the recorded interview as I invited each one to talk about what they had depicted. I then went on to ask questions purely based on the topics they chose to talk about (though minimally, so as not to interrupt the narratives).

In all but one interview, the respondents eventually ran out of things to say about their drawings. In these cases, I invited them to draw another aspect to their life, either another point in time or the main people who were in their life. The same format then proceeded with me asking them to comment on what they had drawn. When the interview came to a natural close, I checked if they had anything further to say and we mutually agreed to end the interview.

3.4.3 An ethical closing

Other important ethical issues were addressed after the interview had finished. Due to the very personal, often intimate, nature of the biographical interview, I spent time talking with each participant after the interview had commenced. Due to the sometimes distressing nature of their narratives, and the confidence with which they had placed in me, I felt that a more sensitive ‘rounding up’ was required than in other interviews I had undertaken in the past. Avoiding the “smash and grab” approach to data collection (Liamputtong, 2007), I wanted to respect the emotional labour that had been invested in sharing their stories. To address this, I adopted the approach advocated by Blagden and Pemberton (2010). In their research with sex offenders, Blagden and Pemberton talk of utilising a more sympathetic and reflexive approach to their interviewing, one which acknowledges a duty of care towards interviewees. As they comment, this in some ways mirrors good clinical practice (p.275). They describe responsibilities in following up on visible emotional distress by offering breaks and stoppages, and ending interviews positively with the focus on the participants’ future hopes and desires. For my own interviewees, it was important for me

that the young men felt safe and respected throughout the process, and that our interactions left them feeling (as much as possible) optimistic and good about what they had just taken part in.

As a final note, I gave each participant a thank you card and £20 gift voucher. This was something I had told the young men about in advance, and had put on the information sheet (Appendix D). Though this may well have acted as an incentive, I did not view this as payment per se, but as a token of respect for the time each young man had devoted to this project. Whilst there is historical controversy over the giving of monetary rewards for participation in research, particularly with regard to whether payment is being offered as an incentive, and therefore running the risk of being seen as coercive ('Compensations, Rewards or Incentives?' n.d.; Head, 2006; Largent, Grady, Miller & Wertheimer, 2012), more recent thinking has underlined the importance of the value of this practice. For example, in the recognition of its role in negotiating with gatekeepers (Head, 2006), in encouraging potential participants to take part in research (Head, 2006; Jacques & Wright, 2008), and in weighing up the general investments the participant has made in the research i.e. time, expenses, inconvenience etc. (Ripley, Macrina, & Markowitz, 2006).

3.4.4 Limitations of the interview context

Again, such that a more informed reading of the analysis might be offered, a short consideration is given to the limitations of the interview context too. As will also be discussed in chapter 6, the context of the interview seemed to have particular power in shaping the narratives. Though this ended up producing some important learning about the impact of criminal justice settings in criminal justice research, and moreover reflected similar research in this area (e.g. Presser, 2008), given the methodological aims for this research to be as an empowering experience as possible for the young men, it is potentially a limitation that data was collected in environments which placed them very directly as 'offenders' (rather than any other aspect of their identity).

3.5 The choice of analytic approach

As narrative criminology is as much methodological as it is theoretical, and as such has been fully described in chapter 2, a further account of the process of analysis is therefore unnecessary. However, to briefly revisit the goals of the analytic approach in line with the principles of NC then, it was to:

1. Explore the narratives for the common themes which set out young men in the CJS
2. Look for evidence of the narrators' intention towards future action
3. Consider the ways in which the social had shaped and influenced the young men's explanations of their lives

This was done in three ways.

Stage 1: Exploring biographies and visual data

The 10 narratives explored in this thesis provided rich sources of data in terms of the common experiences of young adult men in the CJS. However, it was important that the young men were also understood as individuals, each with personal histories that were unique and specific to them. To enable this, I considered each narrator's individual biography. I did this by using "pen portraits" (Holloway & Jefferson, 2000). An explanation of pen portraits, and their usage is detailed in chapter 4.

As part of this first stage, the young men's drawings are also presented. However, they are not analysed as a separate and distinct part of the process. They are considered a visual accompaniment to the wider narrative explorations.

Stage 2: A thematic analysis of the key narrative themes

So as to avoid a fragmented analysis which saw each narrative explored individually with no relation or common ground with others, I looked at the data thematically. However, breaking down the text too much when it comes to doing thematic work can risk losing the overall coherence of the individual narrative (Langdridge, 2007, p.139). To avoid this, I

kept explorations into common themes fairly broad (i.e. not drilling down too much into individual topics through the use of continual sub-themes). In addition, the analysis is also punctuated by individual case-studies. These were used to bring some of the core themes alive.

Also, in line with the socially-constructed approach to NC, I also looked for how each narrator drew on their experience and understandings of the social world to structure their narratives. This was acutely important for this research given its concern with the age-specific rehabilitation discourses which structure and direct the lives of young adult offenders in their day-to-day navigation of the CJS.

Stage 3: Reflexivity and the social context

At the third stage, the analysis took a reflexive stance. Here I considered two things, 1) the potential impact of the circumstances in which the data was collected (i.e. time, place, and space), and 2), in line with Ricoeur (1970) & Gadamer's (2004) position on "the view from somewhere", the potential impact of my own role in the production of that data.

A more detailed account of reflexive theory is considered as part of that analysis, and can be found in chapter 7.

3.6 Ethics

The ethical responsibilities and considerations of this research have been discussed as they have arisen throughout the chapter. They will therefore not be repeated here. However, it is important to note that the research described in this thesis was undertaken to the highest ethical standards as outlined by the British Society of Criminology (the British Society of Criminology Statement of Ethics, 2015, formally The British Society of Criminology's Code of Ethics for Researchers, 2006), and furthermore was done so with the full ethical approval of the University of Portsmouth's Ethical Board (see Appendix A).

Summary

In this chapter, the structure of a phenomenologically informed, critical narrative analysis has been outlined, with an account of how this approach was used in exploring the lived experiences of 10 young adult men in the criminal justice system. As part of this, an extensive case has been made for the need for two unique research methods - the biographical narrative interview and the graphic elicitation drawing task. So as to provide further context and a more informed reading of the main analytic chapters, the limitations of these methods have also been presented. The procedures in undertaking the data collection in both the pilot and the main study have then been discussed. In both cases, all ethical considerations have been debated and addressed. This chapter has concluded with an account of the three stage analytic approach, faithful to the principles of narrative criminology, which was used to explore the young men's narratives.

The following three chapters will now now demonstrate the use of this approach in exploring the narrated accounts of 10 young adult male offenders

Chapter 4: Pen portraits and visual data

In chapter 2, the theoretical and methodological approach of narrative criminology was introduced. It was subsequently argued that this was an extremely useful way of exploring the lives of young adult men in the criminal justice system. Chapter 3, in explaining the methodology for this thesis, subsequently set out how such an approach was undertaken in practice. In preparation for the main analysis taking place in chapters 5 and 6, the following chapter briefly explores the role that detailed pen portraits can have in producing a coherent analysis. The pen portraits of the 10 young men who took part in this research are then presented, along with the drawings they did as part of the data collection process.

Exploring pen portraits

Typically, in social research, an account is made of the basic demographic details of the sample (as identified in chapter 3). In narrative analysis however, broader biographical portraits (Langdridge, 2007) are useful. The portraits help in conceptualising the participant as a whole person, and not an amorphous collection of fragmented responses (as is more the case in traditional qualitative interviewing). As Hollway & Jefferson explain in their usage of such a technique, pen portraits make the participant come alive (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p.70).

The pen portraits presented in the following chapter have been chronologically organised. However, it is important to note this was done retrospectively, and does not reflect the ways in which the young men's stories were told. Mishler (1995) refers to this as the creation of 'temporal ordering'. This was done so as to facilitate a more coherent analysis.

The drawing task

The drawings the young men did as part of the data collection process are presented underneath each pen portrait. Thee drawings do not undergo an analysis per se, though are considered in the main analysis as part of the overall approach. Their function and placement in this chapter is therefore as supporting reference.

The portraits and drawing tasks are presented in the following order:

4.1 Jon's pen portrait (a 19 year old, mixed white/black Caribbean male)

Jon grew up in a household with his mother, an older brother and a younger sister. His father was around for a period of time but left at some point in Jon's younger years. They remained in contact.

Jon described a difficult relationship with his siblings. He and his brother did not see eye-to-eye and would often clash on a number of issues, particularly relating to his brother's treatment of the family home. Jon was also concerned at his brother's lack of motivation in life. His relationship with his sister was also difficult, something Jon attributes to a particular incident. When Jon was around 15/16 and his sister was around 12/13, an argument escalated between them and resulted in Jon hitting her. Their relationship was deeply affected by this, and a reconciliation didn't happen until a few years later when his sister reluctantly visited him in prison.

Jon achieved 7 GCSEs but didn't go to his school sixth form. Instead, he registered with a vocational training programme in his local area, where he studied painting and decorating. Though he finished the course, it held little interest for him. He later went on to a larger, mainstream college and met a new group of friends. It was around this time that Jon also began dealing drugs.

At 16, Jon's mother decided to move the family out of their local area. This was a seminal event for Jon as not only did this take him away from a place he was familiar with, and from a big and newly built home (something Jon underlines to be of considerable importance), it also meant being separated from his grandfather. This was a relationship in which he placed much value, and subsequently caused him significant upset. The process of the move also presented another highly negative event for Jon — a suspected theft. His mother brought in some friends to help them relocate, and in the course of this, money went missing from Jon's desk drawer. Though he confronted his mother's friends, the theft was denied, and his mother brushed the incident under the carpet.

At 18, Jon was sent to prison for street robbery and drug-dealing offences. Though his mother knew of the charges, he had not communicated all the details to his father. He describes his father's shock in court at hearing the extent of his crimes.

At the time of interview, Jon was living back with his mother, brother and sister. He was working at a café and meeting regularly with his YAO mentor. Jon expressed a desire to escape from a life of street crime, and to do something positive with his life. Jon's aspirations were to make a great deal of money so as to enable himself to move to a bigger and better house of his own. He described trying to find routes back in to college to perhaps study a business course. Again though, his motivation was explicitly money orientated (i.e. get qualifications, to get a job as a means to access more money). Jon had no plans nor any interest in pursuing higher education.

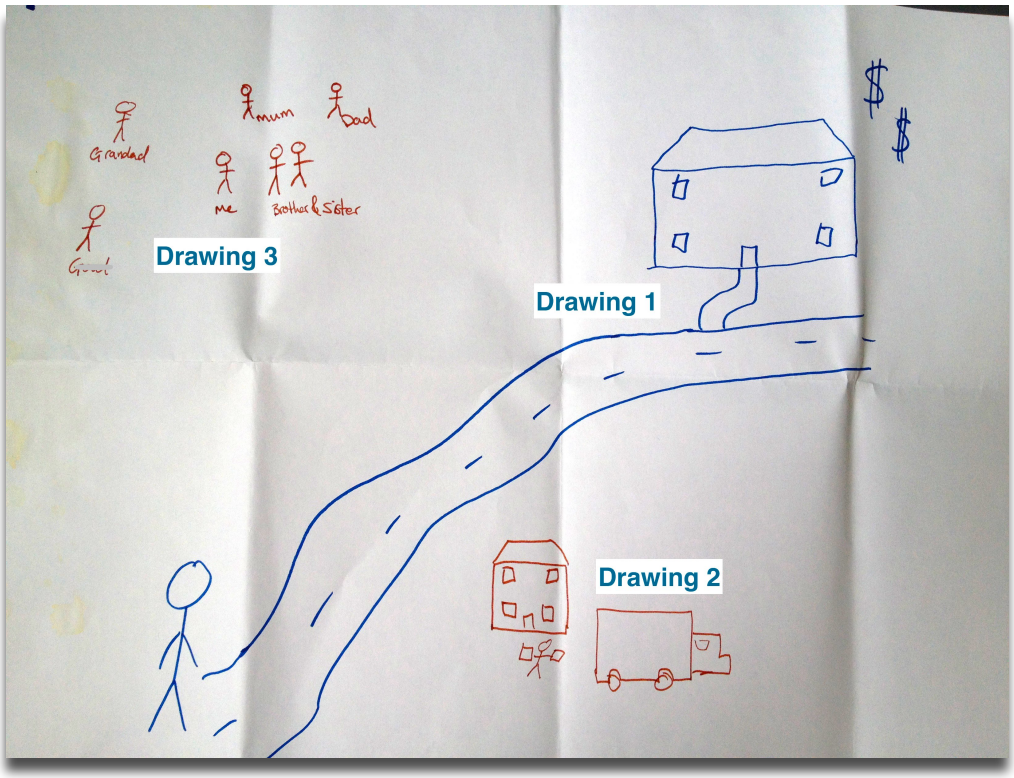

Figure 1: Jon's first, second and third drawings

4.2 Jamal's pen portrait (a 21 year old, Bangladeshi male)

Jamal grew up the sixth child of seven in a large, middle-class Muslim family, comprising of his mother and father, four older sisters, and two brothers (one older and one younger).

Jamal did well at school, achieving eight A*-Cs in his GCSEs. He went on to college and at the same time secured part-time work doing telephone market research. At 17, he passed his driving test, and spent most of his income hiring different rental cars to satisfy his passion for driving. Jamal's life began to change course at this point. He started spending time with a new group of friends, dropped out of college and at the same time developed a problematic drinking habit. He was twice arrested for drink-driving and once for driving whilst disqualified. At 18, Jamal received a suspended sentence and a year's ban from driving.

With his growing alcoholism, Jamal also started experiencing relationship issues - arguing with his girlfriend and his family, and falling out with friends. He began staying away from home for weeks at a time, and by extension breaching the conditions of his court order. Jamal's dependence on alcohol also brought a commensurate need for money. His seasonal work doing market research dried up due to his unreliability, and eventually he was fired. Left with only a living benefit allowance, things became difficult. His drinking was by that time prolific, and he had begun to accrue serious debt with those around him. His new group of friends were heavily involved in crime. The ease and availability of their money making became a draw for Jamal, and subsequently saw his entry into drug-dealing. After just six months he was arrested for supply and possession of drugs, and was remanded without bail. He received an 18-month sentence, requiring a 9 month stay in prison.

Prison was a mixed experience for Jamal. He experienced violence and intimidation there, but also found it to be transformative. It became a place where he could reflect on his life decisions, and reconnect with his religion. It was also in prison where Jamal first directly addressed his alcoholism through meetings with a CARAT worker[17], and made the connections with a YAO mentor.

[17] CARAT workers (Counselling, Assessment, Referral, Advice and Throughcare), operate through prisons as part of drug treatment programmes.

At the time of interview, Jamal was still with his long-term girlfriend and was living back at home with his family. He was doing voluntary work at a local café but, concerned about finances, was looking for paid employment. Outside of this, he was regularly attending his probation appointments and mentoring sessions with his YAO service. He was also going to fortnightly alcohol addiction meetings. He had been sober since his release from prison nine months earlier.

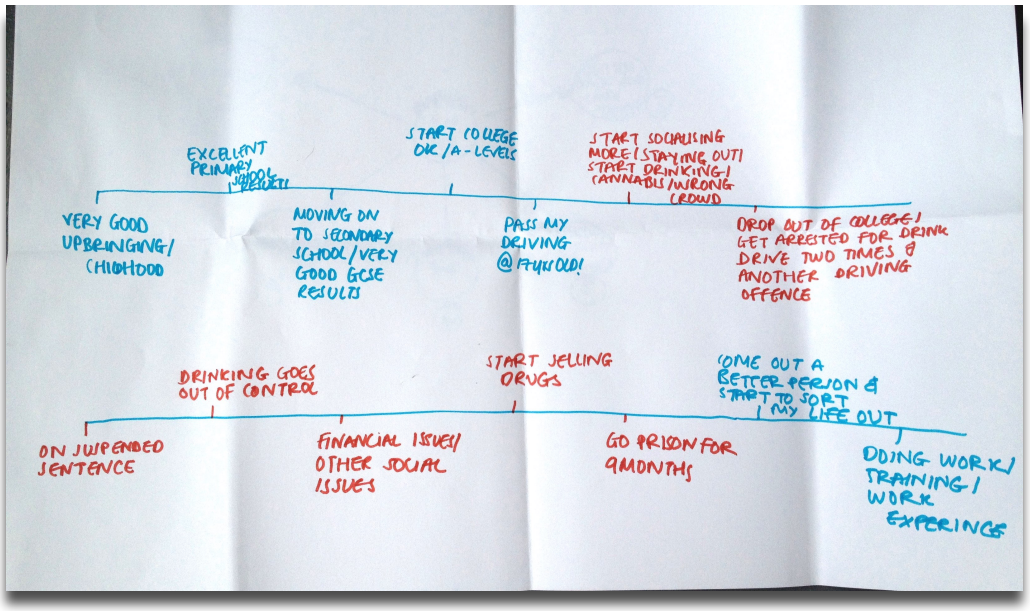

Figure 2: Jamal's first drawing

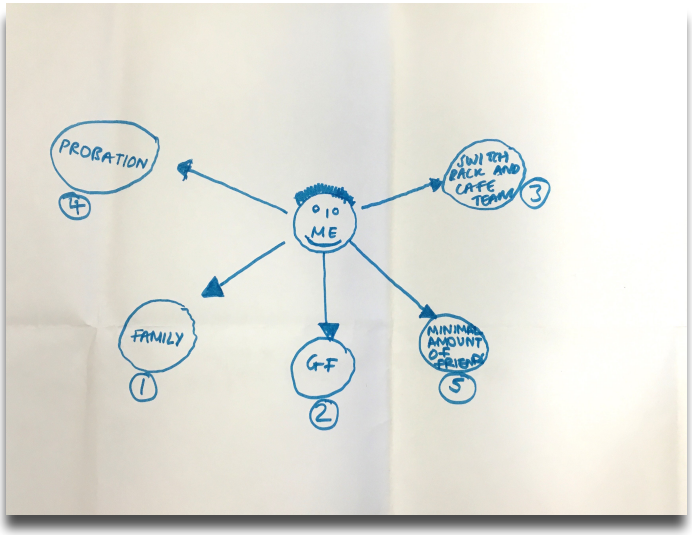

Figure 3: Jamal's second drawing

4.3 Darnel's pen portrait (a 21 year old, black Caribbean male)

Darnel grew up in a busy urban area, living for most of his life with his mother, his two older sisters, and a younger brother. His brother was born eight years after him, meaning much of Darnel's early life was spent living only with older women. His father, though still in his life, had left the family home and started another relationship at some undisclosed point in Darnel's young life. His father's new relationship also resulted in another son, just two years younger than Darnel.

Darnel left school at 16 and went on to college where he began dealing drugs. He was arrested on multiple occasions, and at 18 was electronically tagged. A later arrest saw him receive a suspended sentence. Though this briefly curbed his behaviour, Darnel resumed his drug dealing and was once again arrested. The last arrest resulted in him receiving a custodial sentence.

Darnel first entered prison aged 19, convicted on multiple counts of dealing Class A drugs. He received a first-time sentence of three years, requiring him to serve 18 months inside though this was later reduced to 15 months[18]. Darnel was moved through the prison system several times during his fifteen months stay, his longest stay being at a prison many miles away from his home town. Towards the end of his sentence, Darnel started meeting with a mentor from a YAO organisation, and upon his release took up part-time employment with the organisation's affiliated café — a role he stayed in for six months.

At the time of interview, Darnel was living alone in Approved Premises (AP)[19] but had aspirations to move in to his own flat. He had been out of prison for eight months, and in employment for all of that time (six months in the job organised by the YAO organisation and two months at a cinema cafe in his local area). Though seemingly content with the job, Darnel expressed a desire to return to college to study photography or film-making.

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[18] Though Darnel writes 14 months in his timeline, he later clarifies he served 15 months.

[19] Approved premises (AP) - residencies approved under Section 13 of the Offender Management Act 2007

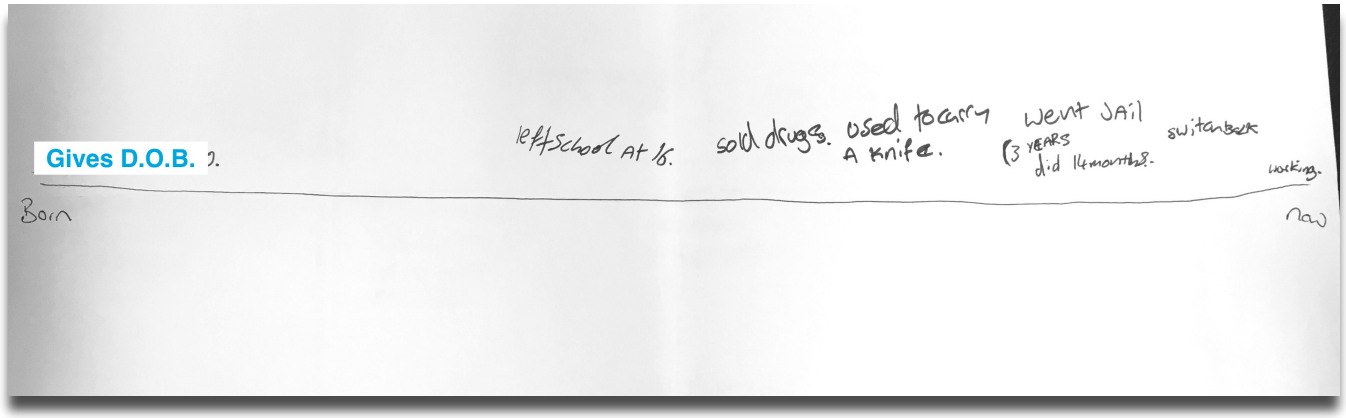

Figure 4: Darnel's drawing

4.4 Keenan's pen portrait (a 23 year old, black Caribbean male)

Keenan was raised by his father and step-mother. He grew up with one older brother, and latterly three step-siblings (two sisters and a brother from his father's new relationship). Though his mother originally had custody of him and his brother, she disappeared from their lives when Keenan was around 5. This proved to be a great loss to Keenan, though (it was suggested) much less so for his brother. Though she maintained contact with them initially, she was prone to making promises that she couldn't keep and eventually communication stopped between them altogether.

Keenan's relationship with his new family was not without problems. Though he described a strong bond with his siblings, especially his younger brother for whom he acted as a secondary parent, his relationship with his father and step-mother was complicated. He was often in arguments with his father and did not fully trust his step-mother. As a result of this constant tension Keenan moved in and out of the family home several times, the first time being when he was just 17 years old.

Keenan held down a number of jobs in his later teenage years, but all were short-term and none brought him any real fulfilment. He was often without money, and because he was frequently living away from home he struggled financially. At 19 years old he became a father, though this was also problematic due to a difficult relationship with the mother of his child.

At 20 years old, Keenan took part in an armed robbery of a local store, acting as the getaway driver. He was sentenced to 40 months in prison. His time in prison was long (particularly for his age), and acted as a time of great change for Keenan. There, he describes discovering patience, self-awareness and perspective.

At the time of interview, Keenan had been out of prison for around a year and had been released from electronic monitoring just a few weeks before. He was living with a new partner, but there were communication problems due to Keenan's continued relationship with the mother of his child, and the fact that they had not long before lost a baby in pregnancy. The still birth of his second child was something his current girlfriend blamed on the stress of the antagonistic presence of his former partner. Keenan was happy

working infrequently as an outdoor activities coach with children, though he was struggling to find consistent employment. He described being highly despondent with the labour market, feeling there were little to no opportunities for young people at that time. He was keen to put his past behind him and start a new, positive chapter in his life. Keenan had aspirations to become more involved in sport, find a secure job (though money rather than employment was the motivation) and start driving again.

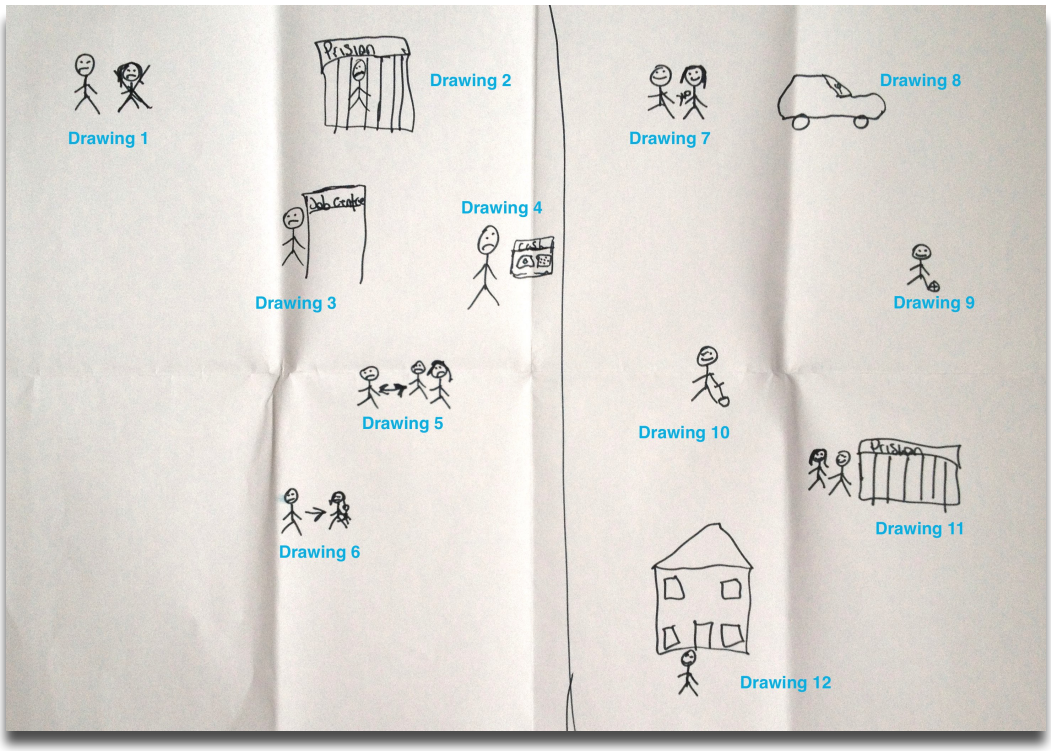

Figure 5: Keenan's drawing

4.5 Kyle (a 21 year old, white male)

Kyle's childhood was punctuated by disruption, neglect and violence. His father was unknown to him, disappearing when Kyle was eight months old. He spent his early years moving around the country with his mother due to her pursuit of relationships with other men. This nomadic lifestyle meant Kyle rarely had routine in his life. It also meant separation from his younger half-sister. She was sent to live with their maternal grandmother due to his mother's inability to cope with a new baby.

Kyle experienced varying levels of abuse throughout his childhood. As a baby, he was burned by his father, and still bears the scars from that to this day. He also witnessed his mother being physically and sexually abused, and was himself subjected to repeated instances of abuse.

School was no happier for Kyle. His mother's frequent relocating meant he was often changing schools. Friendships and other relationships were therefore hard to maintain. He struggled with his weight in his primary school years, something he felt was a result of his mother's inattentive parenting. The subsequent bullying because of this intensified Kyle's social isolation, and consequently, he became defensive and then violent. He was often found fighting with other students and hitting teachers, and this lead to multiple expulsions. At 14, Kyle began drinking heavily and smoking marijuana. His drug use then progressed on to harder substances such as amphetamines, ecstasy and a brief period with crack. Kyle developed a particular dependency on alcohol, something he feels was perpetuated by his mother's permissive parenting.

Kyle's violence and alcohol misuse went on to become a regular feature of his life. He would often end up drinking and then getting in to fights. This drug and alcohol fuelled violence subsequently translated into Kyle ending up in prison. Aged 15, Kyle attacked a 22 year old man he thought was grooming his sister. Whilst heavily intoxicated, he slit the man's throat and then drove off with his car. Kyle was convicted and sent to prison at 16 years-old. He served five years in custody.

Kyle's stay in prison turned out to be a positive experience for him. Though he encountered a violent initiation, he settled in to the lifestyle well and quickly found his place

within the system. The regime of prison gave him structure and boundaries. It also offered him a sense of security. One of the most formative experiences for Kyle whilst in prison was discovering his passion for exercise. Despite being moved between a range of custodial institutions, the prison staff always found a place for him in their gyms. His new desire for fitness overruled his previous addictions, and he found himself refusing old ways of being. Working with gym professionals promoted Kyle's dedication for physical training, and sparked a desire to gain a physical education qualification himself. It also led to his ambition to pursue personal training as a career.

At the time of interview, Kyle had been out of prison for just seven weeks. He was living in Approved Premises but had plans to move to a nearby town to find his own place and seek work as a personal trainer. He was regularly meeting with his probation officer, and receiving mentoring and support from a local YAO organisation. He had all but stopped drinking and had himself requested a 'no alcohol' condition to be placed on his license. He was in a new relationship, and had loose plans for him and his girlfriend to live together in the future. Though Kyle was still in contact with his mother, he expressed a desire to separate from her completely as part of his new life.

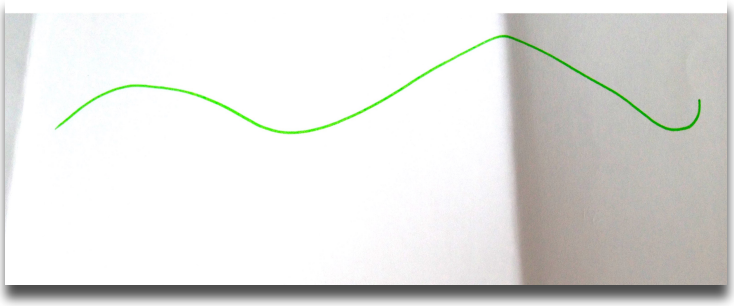

Figure 6: Kyle's first drawing

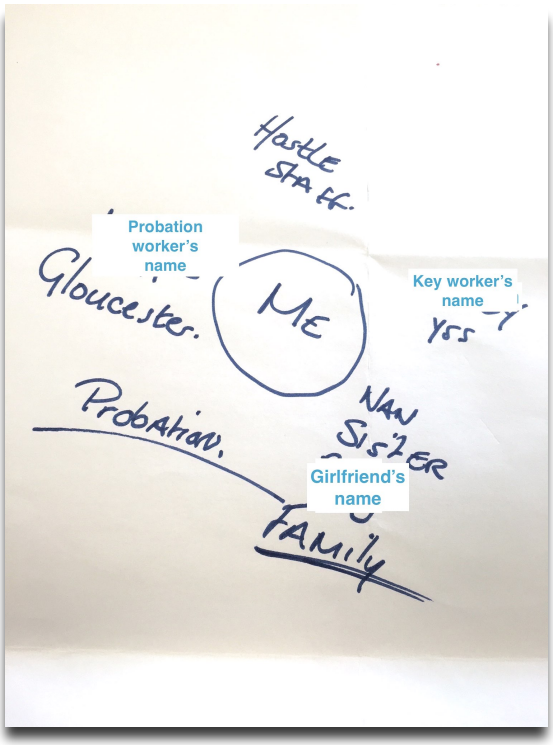

Figure 7: Kyle's second drawing

4.6 Craig's pen portrait (a 24 year old, white male)

Craig grew up on a large council estate. He lived for most of his younger years with his father and three brothers (all from his father's previous relationship). Craig experienced constant aggression and physical abuse from his father, so at age 9 he moved back in with his mother to live above the pub where she worked.

Craig was involved with violence and crime from an early age. He regularly got in to fights and at just 12 began selling drugs, a pathway primarily due to his involvement with an older, crime-active friendship group. As well as drug-dealing, Craig was also using drugs himself, in particular cocaine and marijuana. His casual attitude to drug misuse was something he attributed to his mother's own habit, and her permissive parenting style (encouraging him to smoke marijuana and do other drugs in her presence). He disliked school intensely, and was deliberately disruptive and violent. He was excluded several times, finally leaving school at age 13. From that point on, Craig turned his attention fully to crime.

At 17, Craig's then girlfriend fell pregnant. This calmed Craig for a while, and meant a move to living with his partner in their own place. Not long after the birth of his daughter though, the couple split, and Craig quickly returned to his former criminal lifestyle.

Craig was 20 when he was first sent to jail. He received a three-and-a-half year sentence for arson and recklessness (setting fire to his own house), a result of a drug induced psychosis. He was placed first in a Category A Young Offenders Institution and then a Category B adult prison. He was given 'single-cell status' because of his unpredictable violent outbursts.

Craig's experience in jail was generally positive one. He enjoyed spending time with other inmates and liked the closed environment of the prison. It also pushed him to achieve academically where he had failed to do so before. In particular, it allowed him to work towards becoming a qualified personal trainer. Prison also saw Craig change his attitude towards drugs, stopping his usage almost entirely after his first eight months. This was a notable turning point for Craig given the prolific nature of drugs on his prison wing. He was

released on license after 21 months, but two weeks later got into a fight with his mother's boyfriend and was recalled for a further 16 months.

At the time of interview, Craig had been out of prison for three months. He was meeting regularly with a YAO mentor and had, with the help of that organisation, found a place of his own and got back in to college to do a sports and fitness course. He was seeing his probation officer but was highly mistrustful of her, and was generally resistant to the whole Probation Service. In his personal life, Craig was in a new relationship and his girlfriend was in the process of moving in. Things were still difficult with the mother of his child, and social services was involved in their case. He hadn't seen his daughter for four years, and was at that point in talks with a solicitor to try and re-establish contact. He was in infrequent contact with his mother and had not seen his brothers for a while. He had not seen one brother for eight years. Craig was taking drugs again, but irregularly. He no longer felt he had a dependency on them.

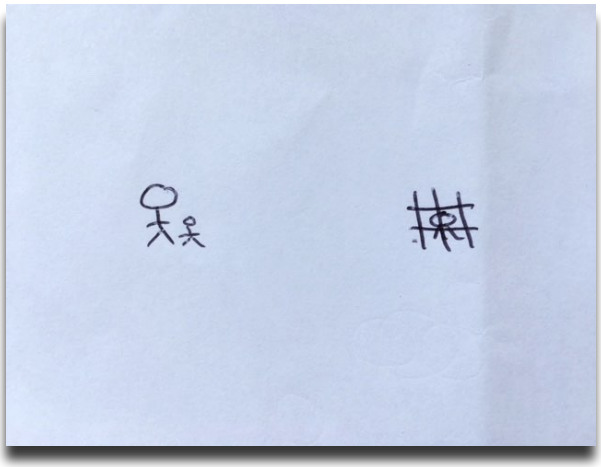

Figure 8: Craig's drawing

4.7 Ben (a 19 year old, white male)

Ben lived for the earliest part of his life with just his mother. Though he had two older brothers (one 5 years older and one seven years older), they had left to live with their father before Ben was born. When he was eight, both his brothers came back to live with him. Though they both had a relationship still with their father, Ben did not. Ben's own father lived locally, though contact between them was minimal.

Ben's behaviour was problematic from a young age. He had difficulty managing his anger, and would often tear up the family home. At just 9 years old, he and a friend were arrested for beating a man who had tried to stop them throwing objects of a motorway bridge onto oncoming traffic. At 10 years old, he joined a gang started by his eldest brother. The gang began by engaging in anti-social behaviour, but soon progressed on to criminal behaviour - predominately theft and robbery. As a result, Ben was always in trouble with the police.

At school, things were just as complex. Ben was excluded in year 7 because of attendance and violence issues. He was put in to a Pupil Referral Unit in year 8, though he refused to attend. At 11, Ben's eldest brother died. This was hugely traumatic for him as they were extremely close. To deal with the grief, Ben started smoking marijuana and drinking heavily. His marijuana usage soon became problematic, and he started using robbery as a means to fund his addiction.

Ben was sentenced to custody twice. The longest sentence was two years for armed robbery. In prison, his mental health suffered greatly. He was bullied, and at one point his cell was set on fire. It was also there that he found out his pregnant ex-girlfriend had died in a car-crash. This sent Ben into severe depression and he attempted suicide. After release, Ben was rehoused in his own place, but his mental health suffered further. He increased his drug taking significantly, including the use of cocaine and ecstasy. The combined problems of Ben's drug misuse and his poor mental health resulted in another suicide attempt. Ben was sent back to prison less than a year after this.

At the time of interview, Ben had not long been out of prison. He was back living with his mother but finding life difficult. He felt trapped between his old friends and ways of being, and a happier crime-free life with a new girlfriend. Ben was interested in finding work as a

chef due to discovering a love and talent for cooking in prison. He was significantly struggling to find work though due to never having had a job, and not being able to produce an adequate CV.

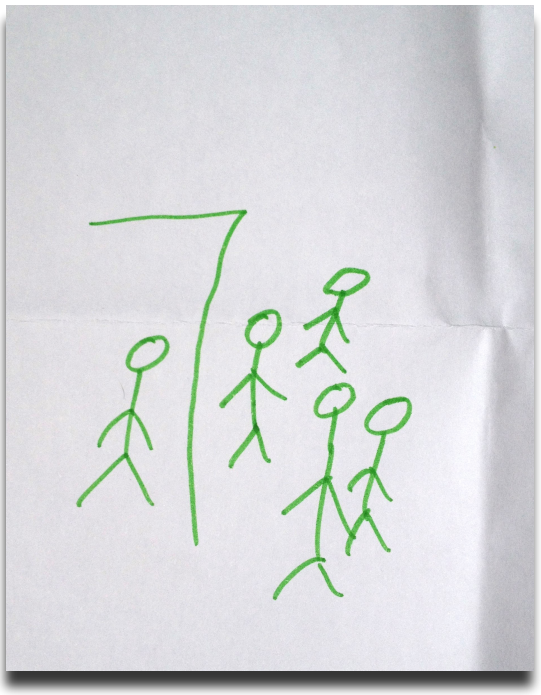

Figure 9: Ben's first drawing

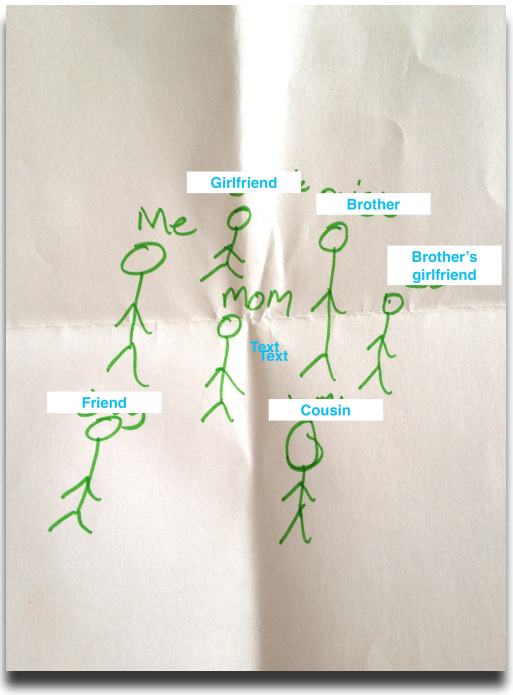

Figure 10: Ben's second drawing

4.8 Scott's pen portrait (a 21 year old, white male)

Scott was the youngest child of three. He grew up living with his mother, older brother and sister, though his sister later moved out and went to live with her father. Scott's own father was absent for most of his younger years. He rematerialised when Scott was around ten, but became violent when Scott started to get in trouble with the police. The last time Scott saw his father was when he was in his mid-teenage years.

At some point before Scott turned 12, his mother met someone else and moved in with him. At the same point, Scott's brother went to live with a friend. This left Scott living with his mother and her boyfriend, and his three children. The combination of a new family and a very strained relationship with his step-father resulted in Scott feeling isolated and unwanted at home.

Scott's criminal activity started young, something he attributed to his unhappy home-life and his social circle. By the time he had reached thirteen, he was was well known to the police. Scott was arrested on many occasions throughout his teenage years, and was sentenced to custody three times. He was 18 when he received his first custodial sentence. His crimes primarily involved theft (of cars and motorbikes), and progressed on to commercial burglary (principally of shops and pubs). Scott's criminal activity was so prolific that at one point it resulted in two consecutive prison sentences. His first prison sentence was for a 30-month duration.

Throughout his life, Scott suffered with serious mental health problems such as anxiety and depression. He was also addicted to cocaine, with much of his criminal behaviour prompted by a need to support that addiction. As he grew older, Scott became a prolific self-harmer and at several times attempted suicide. The most recent incident had involved Scott stabbing himself. These additional difficulties made Scott's prison experience a mixed bag. Though his addiction made the long sentence more palatable, it also meant a harder time for him in dealing with his poor mental health without any proper support. During his final prison sentence, Scott made the decision to seek help to break his drug dependency.

At the time of interview, Scott had been out of prison for eight months and was working with his local YAO organisation. He was living with a friend, and intermittently seeing his family. Though his mental health was improving, his physical health was not great as he had been experiencing pain for some months. He was unclear whether this was to do with a hernia or gallstones. This had also affected his ability to do the very physical job skills training offered by the YAO organisation. Due to his PPO status, Scott was also seeing his probation officer three times a week - something he did not agree with. It also meant he was not allowed to visit his girlfriend at her home, as he was seen as too much of a risk due to several previous parole breaches. Scott was very keen to stay out of prison this time round, so had signed on with the job centre to avoid returning to crime to make his money.

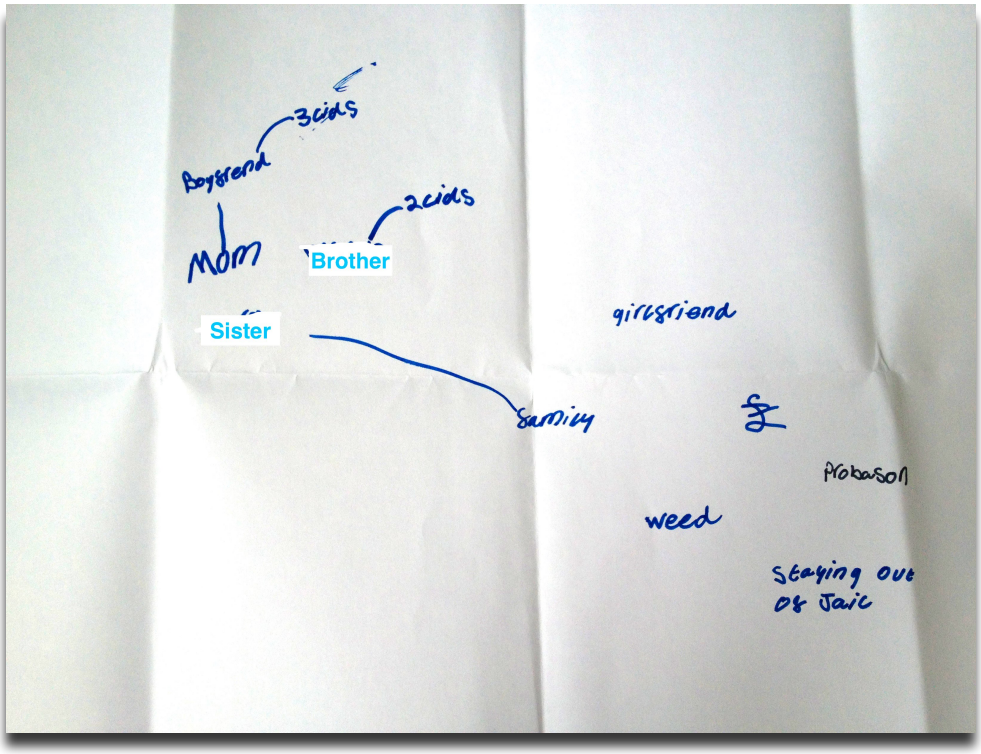

Figure 11: Scott's drawing

4.9 Gary (a 19 year old, white male)

Gary grew up in a house with his mother and three older siblings (two brothers and one sister, all 8 to10 years older than him). His parents separated when he was 4 years old, and his father moved out soon afterwards. Subsequent communication between Gary and his father was poor, and at 14 years-old Gary cut all ties with him.

Gary showed signs of violence from a young age. He started getting into fights at primary school and this continued through to secondary school. The violence became so prolific that he was eventually excluded. At 16, Gary received his first custodial sentence - a three-month stay for violence. A month after release however, he was arrested again and sent back to prison. This time it was for two years. Things briefly improved for Gary after leaving prison for the second time. He secured a job and a place of his own. However, after a year, he was again arrested for fighting and was returned to prison for a further eight months. The last prison stay was the hardest for Gary, as it also meant separation and an eventual split from his girlfriend.

At the time of interview, Gary was living in a halfway hostel. He had come out of prison just six weeks before. He was unhappy with his living circumstances and was looking forward to moving out on his own after the required minimum three month stay. He was regularly seeing a YAO mentor and his probation officer, but described a problematic relationship with both (particularly the latter). He had aspirations to turn his passion for physical fitness in to employment as a personal trainer.

4.10 Tom (a 19 year old, white male)

Tom grew up in a relatively traditional family unit, with his mother and father, and older brother and sister. He experienced a number of traumas in his younger life, including a near death experience at seven years old, and his father being diagnosed with cancer when he was eight years old. The latter in particular affected Tom deeply and made him a target for playground bullying. He developed considerable anger issues and was prone to fighting. One fight in particular saw Tom excluded from primary school for three weeks.

At 15, Tom broke his leg playing football. This was an event holding great significance for Tom as not only was it something he loved and was considered good at, it denied him the chance to pursue the sport at a more professional level. The injury also meant Tom became isolated from friends and teammates as he was unable to join in. Tom later secured a placement on a boxing programme through a scheme made available through his school. This helped him build his strength, and deal with his concomitant emotional issues. His involvement in the programme lasted for just six months though. On the advice of a community support officer, he then joined a weight training and fitness programme. The programme additionally offered support and mentoring. However, as before, this came to a swift end. In this case, funding was withdrawn due to Tom's dwindling attendance.

Tom's struggles with anger continued in to his later teenage years, with him becoming involved in many physical altercations. This radar for antagonism meant that Tom was also regularly the victim of violence. At 17, he was attacked with bricks by a group of young men unknown to him. The incident left Tom with severe anxiety, demonstrated by a fear of going out after dark and a fear of going out at all without the company of others.

Tom experienced extended periods of depression and self-loathing. He would show this by punching walls, cutting himself, and at one point attempting an overdose. He spent his teenage years habitually self-medicating with marijuana. A particularly intense reaction to the drug resulted in him experiencing a panic attack. Due to his anger, self-harm and drug-misuse issues, Tom was eventually placed under the care of a mental health team. He ended up seeing a number of counsellors, and also began attending anger management classes. This period was fairly short lived though, due to Tom finding the process unhelpful, and the counsellors alienating.

As time went on, Tom began to turn his full attention to crime. His offending became persistent and prolific, with crimes involving drugs, theft, robbery and violence. Aged 15, he took his mother's car without her consent, and drove himself into a hedge. Tom was later fined, and received a community service order. At 16, he was arrested again for stealing a BMW, and causing eighteen hundred pounds' worth of damage to the car. This time, Tom was issued with a 12 month driving ban and a fine. In the following years, Tom's crimes became more violent in nature. At 17, he was charged with two accounts of assault - one, for stomping down on and dislodging the eye-socket of an older man, and two, for breaking the nose of another man. This most recent court appearance saw Tom receive an 18 month suspended sentence. He only narrowly avoided a prison term due to the court's concern about his self-harming behaviour and his inability to cope inside prison. This relatively fortunate escape, combined with the negative impact his criminality was having on his family, became a turning point for Tom. He made a conscious decision to desist from crime.

At the time of interview, Tom had just come to the end of his suspended sentence. He was still attending anger management classes, and was actively trying to seek employment. He was temporarily living back with his parents, but was waiting to hear the result of his application for council funded accommodation. Tom was feeling optimistic about the future believing that his criminal record had been expunged by the police following a period of good behaviour. His future goal was to save up enough money to afford driving lessons so that he could become a legitimate, licensed driver.

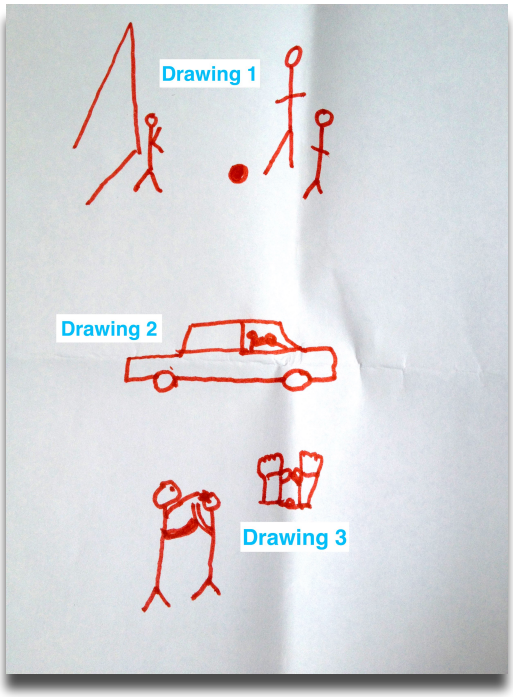

Figure 12: Tom's drawing

Conclusion

As these highly individualised accounts have demonstrated, the value of the pen portraits approach is in what it offers in both bringing these young men's stories to life, and also setting them out as individuals in their own right. As the quote from the former Chief Inspector of Probation which opened this thesis showed, there is frequently a reductive tendency in criminal justice policy and practice which places all 'offenders' in the same boat (albeit separated by age and gender). Rather than navigate criminality at a psychosocial level, understanding offending behaviour as a product of an individual's unique history, we are instead presented with typically socioeconomic offending typologies. Though arguably well intentioned, (in the case of the Chief Inspector's report, it was to highlight a specific commitment to acknowledge the hardships of those in the CJS), the result often ends up with people's very different experiences becoming generalisations and stereotypes. Moreover, such generalisations can also mask important nuance. As these pen portraits have clearly shown, even when there is evidence of common experiences or backgrounds e.g. a history of violent crime, childhood abuse, difficulties with the education system, the realities may play out very differently for each individual.

With these portraits in mind then, and accompanied with the drawings the young men did as part of the data collection process, the following chapters now engage in the main analysis. The analysis is broken into two parts. In the first analysis chapter, a detailed exploration is made into the key themes the young men drew on in explaining and making sense of their lives (chapter 5). In the second, a reflexive analysis of the circumstances of the production of those narratives (chapter 6).

Chapter 5: The narratives of young adult men in the criminal justice system

Chapter 3 set out how a narrative criminology perspective could be useful in exploring the lives of young adult men in the criminal justice system. Chapter 4, in preparing for the main analysis, presented detailed pen portraits of the 10 young men who took part in this study, and the drawings they produced as part of the data collection phase. The following chapter now moves on to the main analysis. This chapter considers the core narrative themes that the young men drew on in explaining and making sense of their lives. Through doing this, consideration is also given to the ways in which the social world has imprinted itself on the lives and therefore explained realities of the young men. The topics explored include masculinities and the construction of gender; money, consumerism and status; friendships, maturity and desistance; blame, shame and the navigation of bad feelings; and finally the young men's constructions of, and beliefs about, the systems and services that have impacted on their lives.

5.1 Masculinities, and performing maleness as a young adult offender

Constructing and performing maleness as a young adult in the CJS was a significant feature of the young men's narratives. Whether this was in drawing on discourses of prison masculinities, or in explanations of *being a man* in the wider community, most had something to say about it. In tackling this topic, and given it was a direct experience for 9 of the 10 young men, it is logical to start with how masculinity was explained within a custodial context.

5.1.1 Masculinities and prison life

As Sabo, Kupers & James (2001, p.5) observe, prison is a key institution for the "expression and reproduction of hegemonic masculinity". This form of masculinity has typically been described in terms of toughness, dominance, physical aggression,

heterosexuality, and emotional fortitude (Crewe, 2014; Jewkes, 2005; Sabo, Kupers & James, 2001). Reflecting this entirely, the young men in this study described a series of masculine *ways of being* when it comes to prison life. Typical explanations drew on discourses of bravado and respect i.e. 'standing up for yourself', avoiding drawing unwanted attention, 'keeping your head down' and social integration, 'being one of the lads'. Of note, these discourses were typically framed within a constant low lying threat of violence.

In line with much of the existing research (Crewe, 2009; Crewe, Warr, Bennett & Smith, 2014; De Viggiani, 2012; Jewkes, 2002, 2005) violence was constructed by the young men as a normal and expected feature of prison life. As Kyle says at one point, "you have your first fight, everyone has a first fight". Typically, such episodes of violence were placed as important markers of one's transition from 'inexperienced new-comer' to 'respected and accepted prison veteran'. This was certainly the case with Scott.

Scott, in particular, talked at length about performing 'legitimate inmate'. He detailed many examples of acceptable (and by extension unacceptable) ways of being including not showing weakness, "proving yourself", and standing up to (or its equivalent, not backing down from) bullies. As he explains, "it's just full of lads, young lads trying to prove their self". In explaining this, Scott drew on a story of his first time in prison.

> *I had my cell robbed when I first ever went to jail… I knew the one lad that done it and that and I said to him 'get the fuck in the showers 'cause that's obviously where everything used to get sorted like, obviously, in the showers, or in your cell, get 'em in to your cell… And then obviously he said 'yeah, yeah, come on then' and obviously he didn't do nothing when we went in there so he must've thought I weren't gonna do it when the officers let me out and then, he was like 'alright' he give me my stuff and shook my hand and that. And obviously they all got on with me from there.*

In this example, Scott draws on the discourse of 'street culture' (Sandberg, 2016; Sandberg & Fleetwood, 2017). Things get 'sorted' in the showers or in the cells, undetected by the prison security. Sorted, in this usage, conceivably being shorthand for executing violence and intimidatory tactics to exert dominance. Notable here, is how Scott conveys meaning about an unsaid issue - *respect*. The incident was a signifier. It was understood by the other inmate that Scott was not intimidated or fearful, and therefore the bullying was short-lived. Moreover, it was recognised as being worthy of respect, and as such was settled with a (gentleman's) handshake. Reflecting Sandberg's (2016) findings in

a similar example of implied respect in the stories of offenders, the word did not need saying. Like with Sandberg's interviewee, the notion was "taken for granted" due to interviewer and participant sharing the narrative repertoire of street culture (p.158).

Within this account too, Scott also discusses potential outcomes. Specifically, he suggests that *not* performing masculinity in this way carries consequences. As Gooch (2019, p.85), says of the experiences of younger offenders in prison, whilst they do not live in constant fear they are "aware of the fundamental need to 'survive' in an environment where they may be tested, intimidated and threatened". This sentiment was reflected in Scott's concluding warning, "you either deal with it or you be a grass to the officers and you get beat up". Either way, for the weak ones, violence is inevitable.

Performing masculinity in prison was something Jamal also talked about.

> *I am quite small, people think they can take advantage of me… I don't let no-one take me for a, if it, even if it means coming off worse. It's just you have to do what you have to do. If someone says they want your packet of cigarettes you tell them 'no'. And that's it. If you get, you end up getting battered you have to take a beating.*

In Jamal's account, masculinity needed to be doubly proved because of physical stature. Being small renders one particularly vulnerable. Even for someone observing the code of 'standing your ground', violence might still be an outcome. Gooch (2019, p.83) suggests such masculinities may not being available to all men, and that some may doubt their ability to embody it. This brings on a subsequent fear of the "physical, social and economic repercussions" should they seem vulnerable or weak (ibid). Even though Jamal implies it is not in his nature, he takes this course of action in order to ensure social acceptance and future physical safety.

Of particular interest in the example before is what Jamal *doesn't* say when he comments, 'I don't let no-one take me for a…". The end of that sentence is heavily implied (though different readers will no doubt add their own word, of course). Its usage in Jamal's narrative is to indicate a trope, 'how you'll be seen if you don't stand up for yourself'. You are a dupe, a fool, or using Darnel's terminology in a similar story of prison masculinity, "a pussy". Sandberg (2016), drawing on Cuddon & Preston's (1998) definition, talks about tropes as the "agreed-upon stories" which are referred to in words or phrases, "through commonly recurring literary and rhetorical devices" (Cuddon & Preston, 1998, cited in

Sandberg, 2016, p.155). These are the stories which are implicitly and commonly understood. Noteworthy too is Jamal's use of second person. He tells the story as a guide to future behaviour. Rather than '*this is what I did'*, the story is framed as '*this is what you do'*. Tropes have temporality. As Sandberg notes of Foucault's archaeological approach to the analysis of language, they reveal the underlying discourses or systems of meaning in a particular time in history (Sandberg, 2016, p.155). Jamal's use of the trope signals that this is how weakness is identified in the current reality of prison culture. Due to the ways things are *now*, such performances of masculinity are essential for survival.

5.1.2 "Us and them": Socially acceptable prison identities

As alluded to in Jamal's example above, not wanting to be "taken for a…", a number of the young men talked about *in-groups* and *out-groups* in structuring their masculine identities. There were those that were seen to flourish in that environment and those that were seen to fail. The task for many of the young men seemed to be in constructing their narratives such that they appeared on the favourable side of that coin. Scott again provides a good example.

> *Er obviously 'cause when I was younger and that I used to be a like upfront lad like I used to say what I think and everyone, all my brother obviously, 'cause my brother's mates are all my brother's age and older so obviously they, my brother said 'oh will you be alright in there 'cause a couple of them have been in there like… they all said 'obviously he should be alright 'cause he's like cheeky and he don't back down like'.*

Scott describes himself as an "upfront lad", someone who isn't afraid to say what he thinks, and won't back down. These are qualities, in fact, which are lauded by important others. In this case, his brother's friends, a few of which have previously been in prison themselves.

This descriptor, in laying the foundation for who he is, simultaneously sets Scott out for who he is *not*. As he continues:

> *…it's like a new person in the playground basically like at school and you're that new person what everyone laughs at for a few days or something till you get to mix in. If you don't mix in with no-one or you don't try and mix in that's when it's like, it's like the saying 'the black sheep', that's what you're coming from basically. You're*

> *pushed to the back and no-one likes you, no-one knows you. You're just like that tramp in the corner cell or something.*

Copes' (2016) ideas around *symbolic boundaries* are useful here. Symbolic boundaries, he explains, are conceptual distinctions made to categorise people, objects, and practices. They function by allowing individual actors to separate people into groups, and thereby allow for the generation of feelings of similarity and status. They also allow actors to put others in the 'out-group' to create social distance (p.194). As Copes explains, "identity construction involves discussing who we are in relation to who we are not." (ibid). As Scott lays out clearly, being in the 'in-group' is not just about standing up to bullies, but involving oneself in prison life generally. There are expected ways of 'doing' prison, and to not do so carries certain identity penalties.

Another good example of this is found in Darnel's story of 'the crying inmate'.

> *One time um, like when I was on the wing like, the guy that was in the cell next to me um like was crying. And then, and then I was like 'why are you crying for? Like, you are an adult and you're sitting on your bed crying because you're in jail and then he was like 'leave me alone'. And like my first thought was he's just scared because he's in jail and he's not, 'cause he wasn't really like the rest of us. 'Cause like when he went jail, he said that, he said that they gave him five years for armed robbery which wasn't actually him. But his friend gave, basically his friend did it and then took the stuff to his house and then gave it to him. And then when all of their houses got, um got raided and so did his. And then he went jail for it. And then my first thought was he's just scared, he's being like a little pussy because he's in jail. But then after, then after a couple of weeks he um, he actually said, he said that he was 'I'm not crying, I'm like because, I'm like…' because his mum kind of like didn't really want to talk to him because she's like really religious and he's the first person in, like in the family to go jail, so she didn't really wanna talk to him in them circumstances.*

In Darnel's world view, crying (in this context at least) is unacceptable. Not only is it antithetical to prison masculinities, it's also childish. You are an "adult", even in an institution that quite explicitly sets you apart for your young age (this incident took place in a YOI). The incident provokes much self-reflection for Darnel. Why might someone who isn't "like the rest of us" be crying? To answer this, Darnel creates, as Copes (2016) suggests, social distance. This is achieved through exploring his status as a convicted offender. As Darnel explains, the protagonist of his story was not guilty of the crime he was sent to prison for. He was, in sum, not a 'proper criminal' (Ugelvik, 2015). Interestingly, Darnel seems to soften when he finds out *why* the young man was actually crying. Though he is still classed as an outsider, there is something about his account of being ostracised

by his family, particularly his mother, that resonates with Darnel. Crying because you are scared is against the code of prison masculinity. Crying because you are sad is perhaps more understandable.

The construction of in-group and out-group masculinities also had moral implications. Gary, in describing his life after leaving prison, talked of his current situation living in a "hostel"[20]. This was something he was not at all happy about given it required his uncomfortable proximity to "nonces". Being housed with sex offenders presented significant problems for Gary's identity, both as hyper-masculine man and commensurately a moral man. Ugelvik (2015), in his research into 'rapists and proper criminals', found that inmates' narratives of exclusion enabled them to forge a moral self. Though they were immoral in the eyes of society, within the prison environment excluding certain unethical others afforded them the opportunity to (re)claim their moral selves. For Gary, being put in with "a load of nonces" risked both his masculinity *and* his morality.

5.1.3 Gym narratives

For several of the young men, their prison experiences brought them to the gym as a way to spend their time and channel their (masculine) energy. Crewe, Warr, Bennett & Smith (2014, p.66) talk of prison gyms being places where strength can be built and (perhaps most importantly) demonstrated. Indeed, of the 9 that went to prison, 4 referenced gym narratives within their wider life stories, with 3 announcing future careers as personal trainers (Kyle, Gary and Craig).

Kyle, for example, made 29 references to the gym and 10 to training or becoming a trainer. It was a firmly embedded part of his identity as a strong, masculine man. Significantly, (as discussed later in this chapter), it was also a confirmed part of his aspirational desistance. In discussing his plans to join a new gym after leaving prison, Kyle outright rejects the idea of expensive gyms with their consumerist trappings of saunas, swimming pools and spas. As he comments, "I only need weights and don't need nothing else". Kyle's 'no frills' masculinity was both practical and reserved.

[20] Gary used the term "hostel", though it refers to his placement in Approved Premises

Gary too devoted much of his narrative to discussing physical training in prison. However, unlike Kyle, it was less about where it could take him (in terms of a hopeful future) and more about his transition from a fragile child to a physically strong man.

> *I was weak then, I couldn't believe how weak I was. I used to bench press 25kg and now I can bench press 130kg, one hundred and thirty.*
>
> *I was putting on a little bit more weight on and then like, like a little bit more weight on the bar every time I was training or like I looked in the mirror like say, I looked a little bit bigger, or someone said like my chest was coming out a bit more or your arms are starting to look a bit bigger, do you know what I mean and you start feeling good, you start thinking 'oh yeah that's probably the weights, it's working'.*

For Gary, the construction of masculinity as a function of gym stories was part of his wider narrative of successfully transitioning to adulthood (discussed further in section 5.5 of this chapter). By building up and changing his body, he was able to physically demonstrate his graduation from child to adult.

However, the construction of masculinity was not just a prison specific issue. The custodial examples explored previously were often a part of broader explanations about how young men, especially young men in the criminal justice system, should be. Masculinity, as their narratives suggested, was an important matter both inside and outside of the prison walls.

5.1.4 Being known, being feared: masculinities, violence and notoriety

Masculine identities were often manifested through the young men's accounts of their personal notoriety. 'Being known' provided social currency. It offered friendship, protection, and most importantly respect. These attributes were particularly desired by Scott.

Scott talked continually about his status as a prolific and other priority offender (PPO). It was the first thing and the last thing that he said about himself. In describing being falsely accused of robbery by his step-father, he states,

> *I'm not bothered. I'm like, oh yeah I get that every day… Even when I was in jail I was getting accused of robbing stuff. It's just who I am, I'm a known person obviously from over the years.*

He later commented that even when his community sentence was complete, that would not be the end of it, “they’ll be watching me more, harder because I’ll be off probation”. Though he did not elaborate on what his particular feelings were about this, there was a definite sense that Scott’s criminal notoriety (for good or bad) was an important part of his masculine identity.

Tom too seemed invested in procuring criminal notoriety, and in particular within narratives of fighting and violence. As Sandberg, Tutenges & Copes (2015, p.1171) note, violence and stories about violence are central in many street cultures, with certain individuals placing high value on having personal “fight stories”. This was profoundly apparent with Tom. For example, within his wider narrative of a life of violence (see Tom’s case study later in this chapter), Tom tells a story of online defamation, and his subsequent action in accepting an invitation to fight.

> *I actually went up to where he was and there was him and eight other lads there, and there was just me and my mate. I stood there at the top waiting for him to come up and punch me like, but I just stood there and he turned, he unblocks me on Facebook saying, “oh, I didn’t wanna come and fight ya, um, you, you look nasty and everything, you, you, you’d batter me”, and I was like, “I’m only proving that I’m not scared to turn up. If you wanted to hit me, you could have hit me”. But, I, I was just standing there. I wasn’t in the mind to go and kick the crap out of him. I just wanted, ‘cause he kept saying I’m scared, and everything, and I wouldn’t turn up so I was saying ‘I’ll turn up’ but if you start then that’s that, but nothing happened… me and my mate decided to walk back home and he has, he hasn’t bothered us since.*

Though (as the story transpires) the fight did not actually take place, this presents no problem for Tom’s implied notoriety. He does not need to demonstrate his capacity for violence. It is known simply by looking at him.

Craig too appeared to enjoy his violent notoriety. Examples were scattered throughout his narrative. As he says of his friends at school, “they always used to follow me and like, ‘cause I was fucking, I was one of the lads”. Of interest is how he constructs this masculinity in explaining his experience of the prison system.

> *Because they put me in A-Cat ‘cause of, for violent offenders because everything I’ve ever been done with is for violence, like fighting and that. So they put me in an A-Cat and then sent me to a B-Cat, adult’s jail. But I actually loved it, in jail. I seriously did.*
>
> *When I first got there I was scared, don’t get me wrong, it was like proper scary, but after a couple of days when you get used to it, it’s just like being on holiday but you*

> *can't go outside (laughs), if you know what I mean. It's just like a holiday camp if you asked me.*

Craig seems proud of his dangerous offender label. Though placed in the highest level of the institution, he had an apparently great time. He even invokes the right-wing media discourse of 'prison as holiday-camp'. Though prison can be a scary place, even he was scared at the beginning, his 'hard-man' persona meant he was able to take it all in his stride.

Kyle too talked of notoriety, but in his case he did not seem keen to preserve it. Unlike Tom, Scott and Craig who suggested being somewhat exhilarated by the idea that they were known and/or feared by others, Kyle saw it as a hinderance.

> *I need to get out of [W] as well. 'Cause everyone knows my business. Everyone knows I've been jail and that like. Least when I walk down a street [in a new town], no-one's gonna know me, are they. And I ain't gotta tell anyone I've been to prison and that. 'Cause it is shameful, innit. It is horrible, like. Especially like, what you went in for like. It's just not nice, is it?*

Indeed, as will be explored at the end of this chapter, Kyle was heavily invested in leaving his past behind him and moving towards a crime free future. It is possible that his disinterest in 'being known' was part of his identity as a reformed character.

5.1.5 Masculinity, gender norms and narratives of protection

There was a common trend amongst the young men in drawing on rather reductive explanations of gender roles in explaining their lives. For some, such explanations also operated as precursors to explaining their index offences. This was the case in Ben's narrative.

In setting out the context for how he became involved in a criminal life, Ben explained his relationship with his brothers. He talked of fighting, getting chased by the police, robbing, vandalism and other anti-social and criminal activities. Characterised as bravado, "just trying to make ourselves look big really", Ben's explanations were scaffolded in the discourse of 'what brothers do'. As he comments at one point, "we were always together and just getting in trouble just like doing what brothers should be doing like". Notable here

is his use of the term “should”. In Ben’s understanding, such activities are a natural course of action of how boys and young men should behave.

Masculinities, when it came to gender, were also demonstrated in heteronormative beliefs about the roles men perform in relation to women. In particular, their role as protectors. As Scott explains:

> *I always protect my mum and my sister, obviously. My brother’s alright ‘cause he’s a lad but with girls they need more protection, don’t they?*

Scott talked of vetting his sister’s prospective boyfriends, not “letting” her date “any old tramp”. This was constructed as the rule, even when those “lads” were friends of his. Drawing also on discourses of respect, Scott described his distaste of men that tried to date his sister without checking with him first. In his world view, that was not ‘the done thing’. Permission must always be sought.

Scott’s views on gender were confirmed and shaped by the behaviour and attitudes of other men in his life. As he says of his role in safeguarding his sister, “it ain’t just me, she’s got brothers from her dad’s side as well. They’re a protective family”. Indeed, Scott’s actions appeared to be a direct reflection of his understanding of how things should be done. Useful in exploring this, is Jennifer Fleetwood’s ideas around narrative habitus (Fleetwood, 2015; 2016). As Fleetwood explains, the narrative habitus structures how a person experiences and interprets their social world, filtering out “improbable practices” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 54, cited in Fleetwood, 2016, p.180). Differentiated along class, race, and gender, the narrative habitus shapes how we see possibilities for action. It is acquired through experience, and so is the product of an individual’s social environment (Fleetwood, 2015, p.373). It is the sense that, because of who we are, the story could never have been otherwise (Fleetwood, 2016, p.174). Understood in this way, Scott’s actions in vetting his sister’s potential relationships, *and* in insisting on his permission being sought in advance, was simply a part of his habitus.

Scott’s beliefs about the responsibilities of men towards women was also important in understanding his investments to future action. This is helpfully demonstrated in a story he tells about his sister’s former boyfriend.

> *…it's someone I knew and he was a tramp, he never had a job, he's like, he's got something wrong with him as well. I wouldn't let my sister be with him. And she kept saying 'I'm not going to finish with him' and that and in the end I had to resort to like saying 'I'll stab him' and everything and was just about to speak to him personally like. And then like, two weeks before I got out of prison he finished with my sister, didn't he like, 'cause he knew that I'd batter him if he didn't.*

In deeming this particular man unworthy, moreover aberrant ("he's got something wrong with him"), Scott states his intention to cause future harm. Though this story is in the past, (this is conceivably no longer action he intends to take), his narrative suggests this to be a way in which he deals with unsuitable men. Shuman (1986) argues, such stories of violence can often relate to past as well as future confrontations. Indeed, as Scott then says of the relationship his mother is *currently* in, "I tell my mum 'make sure' if he ever hit her or anything to make sure she told me". The implication is clear. If she ever did, Scott would likely take a similar course of action.

Kyle too placed himself in the role of protector. However, in exploring this, it is important to consider the narrative as a whole. Kyle's narrative was organised into two parts. The first documented his traumatic childhood, and the second his experiences in prison (detailed in section 5.6 of this chapter). In explaining the first part of his life, Kyle talked at length about his difficult relationship with his mother. In particular, his experiences of having seen her used and abused by range of violent men. The situation left Kyle feeling impotent. He was unable to stand up to the violence he was witnessing as, in his own words, "they were fully grown men… I was only a kid". The events of Kyle's childhood were subsequently used to provide exposition for what was to come, the account of the crime that sent him to prison. As he explains:

> *One night my sister was talking to someone on the internet, it wasn't long after my granddad died, and obviously my granddad was sort of like the father figure sort of to speak 'cause I knew I could always go to me nan's if I didn't wanna be with me mum like. So me granddad was there and that. And er, me sister was on the Internet. She was talking to someone she met and er, he said he was an age that he wasn't. She was only 14, he said he was 17 to my sister, my sister was only 14 So when she went to meet him I went with her found out he was like fuckin' nearly 25, said 'so you're taking the piss basically', and obviously that's when I did my offence and went to prison, protecting her really, 'cause I think, I guess seeing, seeing everything that's happened to my mum over the years, you don't want it, you know I'm big enough and hard enough to sort of look after my little sister, like as where for her I couldn't do nothing.*

The fact that Kyle never directly names his "offence"[21] is perhaps unimportant. Rather, the interest is in the meaning being conveyed here. Like Scott, Kyle's course of action (in committing grievous bodily harm) is understood as the product of his habitus. In this case, a reflexive reaction to the abuse he witnessed and suffered as a child, and part of his later assumed identity as a protector of the vulnerable.

5.2 Money, status and the spoils of crime

Money was a hot topic for a number of the young men, especially for those whose crimes were connected to its acquisition i.e. Jon, Darnel, Scott and Jamal. Their relationships with it was often complex, with money performing certain functions (outside of the obvious), and representing different aspects of their identity.

5.2.1 The good and the bad of money

The young men's complex relationship with money was, interestingly, often reflected in their binary explanations of what value it had to them. Money was constructed as being both good and bad. For example, for Jamal, money performed a number of functions. On the one hand, it was pleasurable. It enabled independence, not having to "rely" on parents, and it offered the chance to procure desirable things, e.g. "nice clothes and food". On the other hand, it was an enabler. It operated as a coconspirator in Jamal's criminogenic dependence on alcohol. As he explains of his conflicted view of money,

> *That sort of money you make through doing illegal activities, you don't have no respect for it at all. No respect for it at all. You make it and it goes out your pocket like that. You don't know where it's gone, on pure crap as well. You don't know where it's gone. Whereas money you make, like actually working hard for, like when I was working before that feeling of making, making that sort of money you can say like 'yes, I worked my arse off for that' and you've, whilst you're spending you can actually enjoy it.*

Though legitimate wage-earning was placed as commendable, and the money it produced enjoyable, the spoils of crime were, by contrast, immoral. As Jamal explained it, drug-

[21] His offence is detailed in Kyle's pen portrait, though it was never spoken of during the interview

money was “dirty money… filthy.” At one point in his narrative, he memorably denies it as having any status at all. As he exclaims, “I can’t think how to describe it. It’s just *not* money”.

This view of good and bad money was also shared by Scott. As he comments:

> *Yeah it’s not money that you earn, like obviously you’ve worked for that so obviously you appreciate it more. But money for free, it’s like, say you go in the shop and buy yourself a cream cake and then me coming giving you one. You’ll enjoy your free one ‘cause it’s for free. You’d enjoy it more wouldn’t you, ‘cause you ain’t paid for it. But obviously you’ll appreciate the one you bought because you’ve spent your money on it.*

Perhaps of significance here, Scott too described his criminality as motivated by his substance misuse. It is possible that Scott and Jamal’s binary view of money was also tied up in what money meant in facilitating their mutual dependencies.

5.2.2 Money and the ‘feel for the game’

For others, money was not an emotional issue. Or rather, its value was attractive enough, such that the choice between the different means for attaining it was, as Engdahl (2008, p. 157) notes, “reduced from a moral to a purely technical problem”. It produced the “readiness to take risks” (Merton 1968, p.195). Of particular note was how some of the young men framed their ability to get money through crime. It was constructed as a natural course of action due to it reflecting their particular experiences of the world. It was, drawing again on Fleetwood (2015; 2016) part of their habitus.

In explaining the habitus, Fleetwood also talks of Bourdieu’s sports metaphor of a ’feel for the game” (Bourdieu, 1990, p.68). This is an instinctive, pre-reflexive, process (Fleetwood, 2015, p.373) where, like the footballer who just knows how to angle his foot to place the ball in the corner of the net, the individual navigates towards particular courses of action because of an instinctive understanding of what could or should be done. This ‘feel for the game’ was demonstrated clearly in the narratives of Darnel and Scott, by way of their explanations of *knowing* how to get money from crime.

KD: ….how did you even know that (selling drugs) was that something you know you could do?

D: I've always known that is something I could do but I didn't really need to. And then..

KD: Why was that?

D: 'Cause I always had some money, and then when I had, like when the money was running out that's when I actually realised that I do actually need to um, like do something to get money. And at first, like I started to apply for um like jobs, part-time jobs, while I was going to college, and then that just didn't go anywhere, and then that's when I thought like I need money and that's the only way I knew that I'll get it.

(Darnel)

Me: So why was it, you know…what was it that made you want to go out robbing again after having that experience in prison?

Scott: Dunno, just needed the money. Obviously I got kicked out of my mum's when I went back so I just thought I'd rob everything again, so that's what I do. That's all I still do know really.

(Scott)

As Darnel later comments about his friends' proclivity for criminal money-making, "that was just what we did… that's who we was". For Darnel, drug-dealing was presented as the natural and taken for granted course of action.

A case study: Jon and the serious business of money

Money, and what it might bring in terms of opulence and social standing, was a uniquely important matter for Jon. It was the source of his his unhappy present and in turn, his aspirational future. Reflecting Merton's (1968) arguments of the relationship between the desire for wealth and status, and its attainment through crime, Jon sets the course for his narrative. Indeed, as depicted in Figure 1, Drawing 1 (p.100 of this thesis), he draws the symbolic road that will take him away from his current "shit" life in his "rubbish" house, and into his wealthy future, which promises a "nice", "big" and "new" house. Importantly, one which he needn't share with others, "by myself, just by myself really". Of particular interest is the use of multiple dollar signs in Jon's drawing. Again, utilising a Strain Theory reading

of Jon's narrative, it is possible that this artistic decision reflected Jon's absorption of and subsequent preoccupation with American consumerism.

Notably, whatever subsidiary story Jon told in explaining his life, it always returned to the wider narrative of his pursuit and interest in money. For example, at one point when talking about his educational history, he discusses his experience at a former vocational training college. This place, Jon makes clear, was not acceptable to him. He describes it as both "little" and "not a proper college". Rather than choosing to go, he "ended up" there. However, upon completing his required pre-entry qualifications, he is allowed access to the local community college. This, by contrast, is legitimate. It is "a good college". Significantly, its benefits are described in terms of its appearance and capacity. It is "nice", and unlike the vocational institution, is "big as well". Though Jon notes these features retrospectively, there is a sense they are of primary importance to him.

Jon's interest in college as a symbolic signal to status is also played out in his explanation of the importance of an education. As he says,

> *Jon: It's not, it's not important but like it would be better if I had like, like more qualifications like, know what I mean?*
>
> *KD: Mmm, why's that?*
>
> *Jon: Well because that's, I suppose that's what people look for in jobs and that, qualifications and that.*

As highlighted in this excerpt, Jon's motivation to go to college seems less about finding the thing he was interested in, or studying towards a particular career, and more about playing the system to get where he wants to be i.e. in a well-paid job. He suggests being willing to put in the time if it brings him the desired rewards. There is an understanding and acceptance of the demands of the labour market. Though qualifications are constructed as rather meaningless, he realises their place in the world and importantly what *not* having them might mean in terms of his personal goals.

Jon's interest in wealth and status agenda is also apparent in a story about his much-loved grandfather. Though it begins as an account of an extremely important relationship in his life, it quickly becomes a vehicle for communicating Jon's interest in the enviable place in which his grandfather lives.

> *I'm close with my granddad… I used to go to his house every week, have dinner there and yeah… But yeah now, now that I've come out and that I've only seen my granddad once, innit. I wanna go down to him like and try to catch him but kind of like move in, move out of my place now and like try and like, like stay at, stay at granddad's for a bit till I get myself proper sorted and that. 'Cause my granddad's, it's a fresh, like the houses, the houses are nice, they are nice houses.*

Though it is not suggested that Jon considers his relationship with his grandfather more attractive by the possibility of coming to live in his nice, fresh house, it perhaps significant that this is a particular detail that Jon calls to mind when talking about him.

As Jon explains it, money is a serious business. There are rules connected to its acquisition *and* its usage. The relationship he has with it is a respectful one. Much of his frustration seemed directed towards those who did not understand this. For example, at one point he talked of his brother moving into his room whilst he was in prison. He described his annoyance upon getting back to find that he had been chain smoking in it. In recounting the conversation, he repeats his words at that time, "you can have the room. I don't wanna be in [it] anymore". He instructs him, "keep that double bed, keep the wardrobe". Sullied by his brother's thoughtless damage, the items became worthless. As he explains in his summary of the event, "see, everything in that room, I bought it, myself, with the money that I was getting". And that appears to be the crux of the problem. In the implied explanation, his brother broke a social code by disrespecting what money was literally affording them.

His mother also proved to be a source of frustration when it came to respecting money. In particular, her inability to manage it. Jon talked of his annoyance about the state of the house they lived in, she's "just let it go… she ain't got the money to fix anything". This frustration was exacerbated in his explanations of moving in the first place, "my mum didn't have to give up the house, she just gave it up because she was in rent arrears". In Jon's telling, his mother's financial difficulties were not because of her struggles with poverty but due competency failures in money management. Supporting this view is her subversion of the usual parent-child role in relying on him for day-to-day funds, "asking for money" when he hasn't "got money to give away". Jon, in having a mother financially dependent on him, *and* who doesn't understand how money works, is thus doubly frustrated.

In Jon's world, money also comes with a moral code. This was demonstrated in a story about his mobile phone provider continuing to withdraw funds from his account whilst he was in prison. As he was unable to use his phone at that time, he explains this as an act of being "screwed over". Again, he claims, "I haven't really got the money to be giving away like that". For Jon, money has a purpose. If its purpose is not being fulfilled, (in this case, if a service is not being utilised), the taking of money is illogical and unethical.

Money and its relationship with ethics comes up again in Jon's narrative. It is in a story which carries much weight in relation to a particular turning point in Jon's life (the theory of turning point in narratives is described later in this chapter). Depicted in his second drawing (p.101), Jon describes an incident where he was robbed by the people helping him and his mother move house.

> *So there's two guys, like they're family friends yeah, and I went up to my room, and obviously I had my money in my, in my drawer. I checked I, like I went up and like the drawer's not there and I was like 'a'ight, cool'. I went to my mum, I was like 'yeah, where's my money? Where's my money? Where's my drawer?' And she's like, 'oh, the guy's name's [Y]', she's like '[Y]'s taken it into the van, innit, so it should be in there'. So I went down and I checked, checked in the, checked in the van and it weren't there, weren't there and then obviously I confronted the guy and then he was just like saying 'oh I haven't taken nothing, I haven't taken nothing', and then yeah, like basically screwed me over, innit.*

Though the stolen money came from Jon's own criminal actions, the stealing in this context is placed as unjust. Another example of him being "screwed over". Money, being the serious business that it is, involves "graft". The returns Jon saw from drug-dealing and street-robbery was the result of his hard work, albeit illegitimate work. For Jon, such opportunistic theft was morally deficient.

Most interestingly is how Jon's relationship with money concludes. His whole story was one of wanting it, needing it, respecting it, and ultimately turning to crime in order to get it. As he states early on in his narrative, "I was more focused on getting money (through crime) than going to school". However, in the end Jon states his intention to retire from the criminal life. Given his huge motivation for the acquirement of money, it seems an unusual choice of action. Though it is possible this is simply a loose plan, or an aspirational but unexpected plan, it might also be the case that Jon had exhausted all other options. As has been explored in this case study, so many of Jon's experiences resulted in him being denied the possession of money, e.g. through being robbed, through people and systems

taking it from him, and most significantly through being imprisoned. It is not inconceivable then that, in negotiating this, Jon simply opts for this new (legitimate) route, in its capacity to offer him a better chance of getting where he wants to be.

> *KD: (Gesturing to Jon's drawing) What do you see happening along these, this road, path to get to get to this end point that you really want?*
>
> *J: What do I see happening? [KD: mmm]. Obviously like I'll get a job so I can like get money coming in. Um, stop hanging around on the streets. Er, er, yeah that's basically it like get a job so I can get the money so I can do what I want to do…*

5.3 Navigating accountability

One of the most divisive themes in the young men's narratives was in how they navigated their own culpability, especially when it came to their criminal behaviour. For some there was ownership, for most however there was a need to distance and divert blame.

5.3.1 Own choice narratives

For a minority of the young men, a clear position was taken in claiming agency for their offending. It was, as they made clear, their "own decision" to get involved with crime. Jon, as explored previously, was amongst this group. Though he cites friends as being an access route to drug-dealing, the choice was constructed as being very much his own. Though his friends were focussed on their education, *he* was focussed on making money. Jamal too claims responsibility for his offending, though (as will be explored later in this chapter) due to his interest in claiming a moral identity, he also distances himself from the worst of it, laying equal blame on his social circle. Notable with Jamal however is how he claims complete agency for his desistance, both from crime and from drinking. As will also be explored later in this chapter, this was an important part of reclaiming his morality. Where the invocation of the own choice narrative was most apparent however, was in the case of Darnel.

A case study: The pragmatism of Darnel

Darnel placed high value on agency and rationality. He continually told stories which depicted him in situations where he was making considered and logical choices about his life. For example, though he had lots of family, and saw them fairly regularly, he refused their visits to prison. In explaining why, he was clear it was not because of any shame, pain or anxiety, it was simply about the distance they would have to travel for such short times seeing him. As he says, “it didn’t make sense”.

Darnel also demonstrates this common sense thinking in pragmatic rejections of commonly accepted discourses of ‘how things are’, as the following (rather amusing) exchange about entry into the labour market shows.

> *D: Um, it was alright, yeah. I learnt a lot of stuff. I was working, I think, for about six months and then I stopped just before Christmas, and then after Christmas I didn’t start back again and then I decided to just focus on looking for work.*
>
> *KD: Mm, it’s tough in this climate though. I mean it’s hard enough for anyone but I know it’s particularly hard for people in their late teens and twenties.*
>
> *D: I didn’t… do you know what yeah, I didn’t find it hard.*
>
> *KD: Really. That’s nice to hear.*
>
> *D: The job that I have now was the first job I applied for and I got it straight away.*
>
> *KD: That’s really good, and it’s a nice place to work it sounds like as well. I like the sound of it with the bar and the, did you say a theatre as well, like with stages?*
>
> *D: Yeah.*
>
> *KD: Yeah, that’s good.*
>
> *D: But literally like I applied for it on the Monday, I had the interview on the Tuesday and I was working the next, I think I was working the next Wednesday.*
>
> *KD: Wow…*
>
> *D: So…*
>
> *KD: That’s a quick turnaround.*
>
> *D: …it wasn’t really that hard.*

Though it may have been easier or more rewarding for Darnel to acquiesce to ideas about the structural disadvantages for young adults when it came to career opportunities, and as such be congratulated for triumphing over adversity, it didn't fit with his experience or logic. Quite simply, Darnel was not having it.

This no-nonsense attitude was also in Darnel's explanations for becoming involved in crime. As explored earlier in this chapter, he needed money, he knew how to get money, and he subsequently chose a criminal life in order to facilitate accessing that money. When questioned as to whether other people in his life made his drug-dealing possible, he denies it out of hand.

> *Um, I'd say yeah and no. There's other people because they did help me get involved but it was my choice to get involved, if that makes sense. Like no-one kind of pushed me into doing it. It was my own choice.*

Sandberg (2009b), in research looking at how offenders pursue respect in the stories of their lives, talks about "own choice" narratives. In his own work he found that offenders presenting their stories in such ways were attempting to "demonstrate that they were in control of their own situation and behavior" (p.495). In this way they became "conscientious individuals" (ibid). This very much appeared to be the case with Darnel. Even when offered the chance to share blame, he opts for complete agency.

Accordingly, Darnel's own choice narrative extended to his desistance. Being in jail afforded him time to consider his options. As he explains of his thought process at the time,

> *…it's not exactly something that somebody would wanna do for the rest of their lives so eventually I'm gonna wanna stop. And then I thought that um that I would need to kind of, like I would need to have something for me to kind of like fall back on, like once I was done. So I just decided to kind of stop doing it when I was in jail, and then when I came out, I kind of just changed everything…*

In weighing up the pros and cons, a criminal lifestyle was found to lack sustainability. As Maruna (2001, p.75) notes, though first-time offenders might ambitiously overestimate their chances of escaping the negative outcomes of crime, "surely every inmate sitting in prison has started to guess that crime does not pay". Darnel, being the pragmatic and logical person that he is, decides to follow the path of desistance for no other reason than it just make good logical sense to do so.

5.3.2 Redistributing blame

However, though there were instances where the young men claimed culpability for their criminality, for the most part they found avenues to distribute blame elsewhere. This was typically through discourses of poor parenting, wayward friends, and in one case, the unfairness of life itself. As Sandberg (2009, p.495) comments, such narratives can be described as ‘‘oppression discourse.’’ Complaints about parents, in particular, was a common theme in the young men’s narratives. Given their ages, the youngest being 19 and the oldest 24, accounts of parents and being parented were particularly fresh in their minds, with many still living at home, or having only recently moved out. Though for some, parent complaints were limited to the perhaps more stereotypical gripes young people have of their parents (e.g. staying out late, having friends over, experimenting with drugs and alcohol), for others, parents were seen to be the very root of their problematic behaviours.

5.3.3 The failings of mothers

As also noted in Holt (2009), mothers often took the brunt of the young men’s complaints as it was often mothers, rather than fathers, that the young men had the most experience of growing up. Of the 10 young men in the study, only Jamal and Tom’s parents were still together. Kyle, Craig, Scott, Jon, Darnel, Ben, and Gary all grew up with their mums, living (predominantly) in single parent households (though some described some periods of having had their fathers around). Keenan was the only one living with his father the whole time, though unusually without his (birth) mother. Though the young men laid various complaints at the feet of their mothers, for example Jon’s mum’s’ inability to manage money, Keenan’s abandoning him as a child, and to a lesser extent Gary and his complaints of the hassles of an interfering mother, they did not directly link those stories to their own ‘negative’ outcomes. However, this was not the case for Craig and Kyle. For these young men, blame was very purposefully directed. In particular, at their mothers’ shortcomings in facilitating their criminogenic dependence on substances.

Craig, for example, talked of starting his drug-taking career when he was around ten or eleven years old. In explaining how he came by drugs at such a young age he comments:

> *Mummy dearest (laughs). I always used to find my mum's stash. I blame my parents for it (laughs).*

Moreover, this blame was not just levelled at her carelessness in having the drugs in the household. She was also described as playing an active part in Craig's descent into substance dependency.

> *When I was younger yeah, I only started smoking weed and draw at times. It wasn't till I was 12 or 13 that I started doing pills and that. So, and that was my mum's fault. She was like, "look here, try this, 'cause I know you are gonna try drugs behind my back anyway so here". Mmm (laughs). Worst thing she did.*

Not only did she facilitate Craig's entry into drug usage, she ensured his graduation on to harder and more dangerous drugs. The usage of which, as Craig later explains, became the reason for the crime for which he was sent to prison (i.e. committing arson whilst intoxicated).

However, where Craig's accusations of his mother's culpability were just related to his substance dependency, Kyle implicates his mother in a host of wrongs he experienced as a child.

A case study: Kyle and the discourse of 'mother-blame'

Kyle's discourse of mother blame was a primary feature of his narrative. He attributed many of the problems he experienced in his life to his mother's perceived shortcomings, often drawing on canonical narratives to do so. Bruner (2003) explains canonical narratives as individual stories that represent broader societal stories of the ways in which people must live their lives (as in Langdridge, 2007, p.147). In Kyle's case, it was 'how good mothers should be', and subsequently, how she failed in that regard. For example, when talking about his struggles with childhood obesity, being bullied for being "proper chubby", he explains it as the result of never having had a mother. Though of course he does, (the story is also about her), this rhetorical shorthand is used to render her, narratively speaking, absent from his childhood.

Kyle also implicates his mother in his alcohol dependency. In explaining why he started drinking, he says:

> *I couldn't even put a reason on it, to be honest. See a can on the side, the one that me mum left, and thought 'oh I'll have that, see what it's like'.*

Though he cites 'opportunity' as the instigating factor, he notably draws his mother into the story. It wasn't just any can left on the side, it was *her* can. Though this might well be incidental, an associated memory triggered by the telling of the main event, there appears to be purpose in its inclusion. Not only is she a drinker herself, she is also negligent. Kyle's gesturing to his mother's irresponsible behaviour is even more pronounced as he explores his descent in to alcoholism.

> *The drink was getting bad. I used to wake up every morning and I wouldn't be able to move till I had had a drink. So mum used to always make sure there was a can of lager there to wake up to, which is terrible really, isn't it? You'd expect like breakfast or something. Not a can of lager, like.*

Rather than divert him from this destructive path, she supports him staying on it. Notable is how Kyle again invokes canonical narratives of 'good mother' behaviour i.e. the provision of a morning meal. This done, she is found to be doubly negligent. Kyle's judgment over his mother also extends to her sexuality. As he is quick to point out, the constant flux of his living situation was a direct result of her frequently changing sexual relationships. The retelling of these events leaves no doubt as to his feelings about the matter. His mother is selfish, "fuck[ing] up" his childhood by moving them about to be with different partners, and her sexual behaviour is unacceptable. She is "a slag, really".

However, despite the many ways in which he sets up his mother's failings, and how they negatively impacted on his life, Kyle in the end unexpectedly elects to deny her blame. As he says, "I don't blame my mum for my childhood. I blame her for moving around and that, but I don't blame her for her getting beat up and raped". Indeed, as he later claims, "I don't blame anyone for me childhood". Though he continually exposes his mother's bad parenting, he seemingly won't allow her to be responsible for his ruined childhood. As will be explored later in this chapter, a possible reason for this might lie in Kyle's particular beliefs about what such personal responsibility brings.

5.3.4 The failings of fathers

Fathers too had their share of the blame. Unlike mothers though, this was principally due to their absence (e.g. in the cases of Scott, Craig, Kyle, Ben, and Gary). In some cases, these absent fathers were also said to be sources of violence and abuse (e.g. Scott explains of having his father grab him by the throat, and Kyle of having hot coffee deliberately poured on him as a baby). However, though reports of dads were occasionally far from glowing, almost none were constructed as being the cause of the young men's criminality. The only case where this did happen was with Keenan.

A case study: Keenan and the failings of fathers, and the consequences for sons

Keenan's narrative was unusual, in that it barely referred to his criminal past. Though explanations of criminality were not a directed part of the interview agenda, (the young men were simply encouraged to talk about their lives), the fact they were being asked to participate in the study *because* of their status as YAO meant that most chose criminality as a central theme. Instead, Keenan's narrative choices focussed almost exclusively on his problematic personal relationships. For example, his mother abandoning him as a child (depicted in Figure 5, Drawing 1, p.106); his difficult/combative relationship with father and step-mother (Drawing 5); his estrangement from the mother of his son, and the subsequent custody battle (Drawing 6); his current life with his new girlfriend (Drawing 7 & 11); his step-mother's betrayal (telling his father about his criminal charges), and most significantly, his ancillary parenting of his younger brother (also represented as part of Drawing 5).

Keenan began his narrative by talking about his mother's abandonment of him as a child. He tells a story of, aged 5, waiting to be collected but his mother never showing up. Little more is devoted to talking about her, (after all, what more is there to say), though her absence is felt in the many references he makes to his relationship with his step-mother. Though functional and civil, he does not feel the "maternal bond". In terms of family then, Keenan's focus resides principally in the two most significant men in his life, his father and his younger brother

Keenan was keen to eschew blame for the things that he had done in his life that he was not proud of. For the most part, this was achieved through diverting blame elsewhere, principally towards his father. One of the most explicit examples is found in Keenan's explanations of becoming a father himself.

> *There's a lot of things that he hadn't told me, kind of thing that a dad should tell their son… Just like, I dunno, just like general stuff you'd tell a boy. Like he never told me about girls or anything, just stuff like that that a dad should, I've had to find out stuff my own way. That's the reason why I've got a baby.*

Keenan plays around with canonical notions of growing up, father/son bonding and conversations of 'the birds and the bees'. These things are constructed as an expected part of the role of fathers. Though that might well be argued as the case, laying the full blame on his father for Keenan getting his own girlfriend pregnant seems perhaps a little out of proportion. The father blame discourse, however, was not just in Keenan becoming a young dad, it was also directed towards his father's role in contributing to his criminality. Though he doesn't say explicitly how, the conclusion is made anyway, "if we was close I might not have gone down this road".

However, though these first two accounts usefully set up Keenan's narrative, they are not where his primary focus is when it comes to blaming his father. His complaints are principally centred on his father's parenting of Keenan's younger brother.

Keenan's role as ancillary parent

Keenan talked almost continually about his brother. In places his narrative felt more like a biography, rather than the story of his own life. He spoke often of looking out for him, being worried about what he was up to or what was going on for him, and often placed himself in situations where he was seen to be giving advice. For example, on how his brother might flourish in a university setting, or in knuckling down to adult ways of being now he is growing up. He would typically speak of him in ways that made himself more like a parent than an older brother. In introducing his brother, Keenan again discusses his relationship with his father. For example, he references their similar personalities, their constant arguments whilst Keenan was growing up, and the fact he moved out of the house a few times because of it. In doing this, Keenan directs the narrative to the main point he wants

to make, that people must be allowed to make mistakes, and *by extension* his father's shortcomings in not allowing for that.

> *I can see it's like happening with my little brother as well like 'cause he's starting, he's starting to argue with him as well, so like I just try and, I don't try and step, like get involved, I just try and like just say to them like, 'just leave him, he needs to go' you see people have to make mistakes to learn. That's how people are, like that's how we learn like. We make a mistake.*

This discourse of 'learning through mistakes' came up a lot. Often, it was filtered through the trope of 'boys will be boys', as the following example demonstrates:

> *I just think to myself you have to leave him 'cause, he's a boy as well… he has to experience like, I dunno, playing football and doing, breaking his leg 'cause he fell out of a tree, kind of stuff like that that boys will do like, and I dunno, falling in to a stinger bush… I dunno, riding to the other side of [the town] and stuff like that, stuff that boys would do and like yeah, go on like day-trips, not tell your mum and dad and then you come back and they've found out, he just needs to live and they're not letting him like, and so, I dunno. I dunno, you have to experience things, stuff like that, getting done, and getting dragged by the person back to the house, getting into trouble so, it's just I dunno, yeah, it's just, it's just being a kid, isn't it?*

This excerpt plays to the idea that mistakes are formative, character building and most importantly, a rite of passage. Keenan draws on rather whimsical notions of boyhood to illustrate his point, and seems heavily invested in normalising it all. Interestingly, Keenan's notions of boyhood then considerably ramp up a notch to include getting run down by cars, 'throwing eggs at people's houses" and putting "a firework in the phone-box". All are placed as the "fun… stupid stuff" *all* young boys experience growing up. Though in taking this position, Keenan appears to be allowing his brother recourse to act in such ways without judgement, he simultaneously seems be allowing his younger self a similar pass.

Keenan, his crimes and learning from past mistakes

However, even in establishing such 'high jinks' to be a natural characteristic of boyhood, Keenan is still left navigating some uncomfortable territory. His crime (rather serious in nature) cannot easily be explained as something all boys do. As such, he needs another approach. This is achieved through employing a number of diversionary tactics.

> *I was working and do you know what, to be honest, I didn't even need the money, I think it was just more of like, just me like fitting in with my friends, kind of thing, so 'cause that's all like, 'cause basically like I just got a phone call and was like, "do*

> *you wanna do this?'"and I was like 'ee, well, and I thought about it, I was thinking, do I really even need to do it?'. I think it's 'cause I was bored like with my day off so, and I was like "yeah" and then like they just, they went and done, they went and done, I got done for robbery, so like they went and done the robbery, 'cause I didn't even do, I weren't involved, I was just driving, so like they done whatever they done and then they come out. And like as soon as I had like, I got arrested I was thinking to myself, '"look, why have I done that"' kind of thing, like, and it was just, I think it was just a moment of not thinking.*

Maruna & Copes (2005), in referring to Maruna's (2001) study into desistance, talk of the distorting techniques offenders can use to externalise blame for their past acts, thereby minimising their own internal deviance (Maruna & Copes, 2005, p.281). This is highly evident in Keenan's account of his crime. Indeed, here blame is eschewed in a number of ways. Firstly through attributing it elsewhere, 'it was my friends' idea". Secondly, through minimisation, "I was *just* driving". And thirdly, through invoking the discourse of capricious youth, the crime reduced to 'a moment of not thinking'. Keenan's role in an armed robbery is subsequently played out as youthful energy, prompted by a need to keep up with the peer group. The severity of the crime is downgraded to a brief moment of teenage recklessness. A silly mistake.

This narrative of learning from mistakes made is an important one. It is the thing Keenan accuses his father of. Importantly, by not allowing Keenan any freedom to 'make silly mistakes', things can escalate. As he in fact explicitly states on this matter,

> *You have to have that experience because if you don't experience it now you will experience it when you're older, which means you're doing worser stuff.*

Because his father was (we might assume) so strict with Keenan, it caused him to act out as a younger teenager. His father's controlling parent style effectively drove Keenan down the wrong path. Recalling his words at the beginning of the interview, "if we was close I might not have gone down this road", the statement now has considerably more resonance.

However, as part of the growth from all this, learning from mistakes made, Keenan's bad deeds need to become "meaningful" (Maruna, 2001, p.87). It is helpful to consider this in the context Maruna's redemption scripts. In describing his desisters, Maruna (2001) talks of the stage of finding one's higher purpose and fulfilment (p.99). Maruna draws on Erik Erikson's ideas around generativity, "I am what survives me" (Erikson, 1968, p.141, cited in

Maruna, 2001, p.99). Generativity encapsulates the idea of a concern for, and commitment to, promoting the interests of the next generation, through parenting, teaching and mentoring (ibid). “The desisting ex-offender has found meaning in his or her otherwise shame-filled past” (p.105). Understanding the function of this narrative then makes it easier to understand why Keenan is so invested in his role of ancillary guardian to his younger brother. This is explained best in the following quote:

> *If I could see in to the future in 15 years’ time and that, all my brothers and sisters they would have, not a perfect like but they didn’t get in to trouble, they all got in to college, uni, and they’re all doing whatever, they got a house and a family and stuff, and they all learn from my mistakes, I’d happily do these mistakes ten times over to make sure that they wouldn’t do the same mistakes, ‘cause like I don’t think, I think my brother’s learned from me that he don’t wanna do anything bad ‘cause look what happens, so, and I’d do that, I’d do that every time, ten times out of ten if it means that he wouldn’t do it.*

Here, Keenan’s criminal past becomes a valuable and protective lesson for his younger siblings. Rather than the focus being on his criminal actions, it is on his role as “moral hero” (p.105). Through the learning provided by his painful past mistakes, Keenan prevents the same thing happening to anyone else.

5.3.5 Peer pressure and problematic friendships

Blame, however, was not just reserved for parents. It was also brought to the door of friends. Indeed, friendships were one of the most common ways the young men elected to eschew their criminal culpability, *and* explain their entry into criminality. This was mostly through drawing on discourses of friends as bad influences. This technique was very apparent amongst those most keen to preserve their ‘good guy’ personas i.e. Keenan, Ben and to the largest degree Jamal. Positioning friends as bad influences worked on several levels. Notably, in diminishing individual responsibility *and* alleviating guilt. However, it is useful to explore things in turn.

Friends and friendship groups were often explained as being, themselves, criminogenic. The young men’s very exposure to them seemed to carry a self-fulfilling prophecy that criminality was bound to follow. As Craig puts it, “they just get you in to trouble”. In many of the stories, friends were placed as the ones who would *start things first*. The young men,

as the story's protagonists, were simply sidekicks, or worse dupes to a greater power. This is demonstrated in Tom's account of an incident of twocking.

> *He, he got out, sort of thing, dropped his keys, and my mate found 'em and, at that moment in time I was easily led to doing stuff, against the law, sort of thing. If someone told me to go do something I'd go do it. It's stupid. And er, he goes 'oh look at that Beemer over there', and I was like 'yeah' and he clicked the button and it just opened, and I was like (whispered) 'fucking hell'. And then we got in, we took it for a spin at three o'clock in the morning.*

Jamal too draws on discourses of being easily lead. He extends this, however, to place his friends as predators to his particular vulnerabilities. As he explains it, in trying to navigate his own alcoholism, he was weak to the manipulative suggestions of his social group.

> *You start thinking, 'ok, how do I make money, how do I make money? I need quick money, need quick money.' And you're sort of indisposed at that moment, under the influence, where you don't really consider what you're doing. When somebody proposes you to you, they show you a very good life. They show you this amount of money, they show you that amount of money. They show you how easy it is. Just do it. I got carried away.*

Bad influence friendships were also apparent in stories of challenges to noble desistance aspirations. Here, the young men placed themselves in scenarios where they were being required to draw on their moral reserves in order to the resist the seductive behaviour of mischievous others. This is apparent in a story Jon tells in which he and his friends stumble across an "empty house".

> *Yeah, them lot were climbing over the bar then and like they were, like obviously they're like, "yeah, come, come, like yeah it's just blessed, it's blessed. You're not gonna get caught. Nothing's gonna happen". And then obviously I was like "no, no, no. I'm not doing that. I'm not doing that". So obviously, I was just waiting at the corner and that and obviously I was with that other boy [L], [L] was waiting with me as well… we was just chilling there and they done their thing and then they come out and then yeah, so obviously, obviously I can resist it…I just, I just need to keep my mind straight, stick to what I'm doing.*

In his retelling, Jon constructs himself as having the strength of character to be able to avoid the tempting spoils of crime. All this despite his troublesome friends' trying their best to draw him in.

A very similar account is made by Ben. Again, troublesome friends are pegged as being guilty of trying to lead the good protagonist astray.

> *My mate yesterday kept on hassling me and going 'come on [L], leave your girl man', he goes, 'bros before hoes' and stuff like that. I was like 'you may think like that' yeah, I goes, 'but you don't wanna sort your life out obviously, and I want to'.*

Ben's relationship with his friends was a particularly significant one in terms of his criminality. As shown in his first drawing, (Figure 9, p.112), they were placed as the very reason for him being unable to get out of his current cycle of crime. He uses the metaphor of being trapped in a box, unable to get out, commenting "I want to escape and just sort my life out". The suggestion, of course, was that he did not see this as being possible. As he later adds,

> *I could have moved out the area and just sorted my life out and not got arrested for what I got arrested for, and I wouldn't be sitting here now like.*

Indeed, not only did friends draw him into bad behaviour and criminality, they kept him there.

Ben's account is reminiscent of Maruna's (2001) analysis of the condemnation scripts of persistent offenders. He talks of the persisters feeling "powerless to change their behaviour", because of any number of social conditions e.g. drug dependency, poverty, lack of education and skills, or societal prejudice (p.74). Such offenders saw no real hope for change, and become resigned to the fate that had been handed to them (p.76). As Ben states at one point, 'I've been in a gang since I was 10. It's hard to get away". His friendships are anchors for his criminality. As such, Ben constructs himself as "doomed to deviance" (p.74).

Interestingly, though Scott too toys with the discourse of friend blame, he ultimately decides on it being his own decision.

> *I just chose the wrong people probably to hang around with and like, just, dunno, felt like I get pushed away as well, probably in times. Obviously it's my mates as well that I hung around with… actually I can't say 'yeah it's because I got pushed away and it's because of all my family 'cause it ain't. Obviously I chose them people to hang around with and I chose the life that I'm in.*

As explored earlier in this chapter, Scott's investment in his offender identity may well have played into his decision to take ownership for his own criminal behaviour.

In a development to the wider bad friends narrative, a number of the young men also drew on the discourse of 'my friends are worse' . Indeed, this was a popular one amongst the young men in placing their own bad behaviour in a more favourable light. Maruna & Copes (2005), in considering the implications of Sykes & Matza's (1957) techniques of neutralization theory, talk of how offenders can relieve themselves of responsibility for their actions through certain ways of framing their 'master account'. As such, social disapproval and personal failure are mitigated (Maruna & Copes, 2005, p.231-232). For the young men in this study, suggesting that the behaviour of their friends was so much worse allowed them to sidestep at least some of the culpability for their own 'bad' deeds.

Ben uses this approach in several places. For example, though he explains his own bad behaviour as a result of his substance dependency, "kick[ing] off at his mother and "smashing the house up", his friend is constructed as much worse.

> *My mate he's, he's total worst of me like, he smashes, he punches his mum in the face like but she still gives him money. And I'm thinking, I could never be like that to my mum.*

Through this, not only is Ben able to mitigate his own violence, he also is able to claim a moral position. Unlike his terrible friend, he could never treat his own mother like that. This technique is used again when he explains about his friends' typical daily drug expenditure,

> *'Cause like my friends yeah, they buy £40 pounds worth a day and I'm like "oh my god" because like we'd only just get on a session and that and I'm thinking "oh what is the point in this" but I still go along with it anyway…*

Through invoking the 'my friends are worse' discourse, Ben is able to make his own addiction and addictive personality look in proportion. He is not interested in the excesses of drug use. He is simply easily lead.

In one case however, blame came not from negligent families, or wayward friends, but from the sheer misfortune of the cards life had dealt. This was the case with Tom.

A case study: Tom and the diversion of blame through victimhood

Tom's story was an interesting one in terms of the battle for his various narrative identities. The main three in contention were Tom as 'hard-man', Tom as 'victim', and Tom as 'tragic hero'. The work of Canter and co. (as discussed in chapter 2) is relevant here. In particular, their explanations of the narrative roles of Hero and Revenger.

The Hero role, as explained by Youngs & Canter (2012), is an individual who must prove themselves. They are part of a "great mission" (p.299). The narrative story is one of overcoming obstacles in pursuit of "pure and joyful objectives" (ibid). The Hero, in their hubris, takes on and overcomes challenges (p.307). They have a strong sense of self-awareness, and others have significance for them (ibid). The Hero may also feel they have been dishonoured, bringing forth bravado and nonchalance. They will demand consequences for their actions, for example, "*looking for recognition"* (Canter & Youngs, 2009, p.128). Spruin, Canter, Youngs & Coulston (2014) advance this in explaining the Hero as part of the wider narrative genre of Frye's (1957) 'Quest'. The heroic voyage of the quest is the driving force behind the offender's criminal actions. Typical scripts feature responses such as "being unable to *stop myself",* or "feeling that it was a *manly* thing to do" (Spruin, Canter, Youngs & Coulston, 2014, p.449). Relevant too is the Revenger. The Revenger is drawn from Frye's (1957) 'Tragedy' narrative, and is characterised by distress and blame. The Revenger portrays a story of the "unstoppable revenge" of someone who has been wrongfully treated and deprived, and where the offender retaliates by seeking revenge in order to achieve what they believe is *right* (Spruin, Canter, Youngs & Coulston, 2014, p.550). The offender believes that they have no choice. It is captured by responses which seek to justify actions, i.e. in assertions that the action they took was right, and that revenge was their only option (Spruin, Canter, Youngs & Coulston, 2014, p.550). With these constructions in mind, it is now possible to look more closely at Tom's story.

Tom's narrative was almost entirely framed around stories of violence. It begins in *medias res*. He opens by talking about an incident when he was 15 of where he broke his leg playing football (Figure 12, Drawing 1, p.117). This story, long and detailed, charts a series of events which saw Tom deliberately targeted by malicious others who sought to bring him harm. It is also constructed within a wider narrative of loss. Because of this, Tom missed his chance to be be professionally signed by a football scout. Tom, subsequently, spends his days watching sadly from the sidelines. At a more obvious level, the story

appears to function in the symbolic. It is a marker with which he is able to identify a change in fortune. As it later transpires, Tom's criminal activity took off when he was around 15 years old. It feels plausible then that he opened with this story by way of explanation, 'this is where things went wrong'. However, though useful as part of the background to his later criminality, that is not everything that is going on here. This story also lays the foundations for a consistent feature of Tom's narrative - the positioning of himself as 'victim'.

Tom's next topic is his account of finding out his father had cancer. This marks a particularly important time in Tom's life, as it also became the trigger for his problems with anger, *and* his predisposition for violent reaction.

> *I found out my dad had cancer and everything when I was eight, I've never been right since then, and er, through school it was a nightmare. Er, this one lad turned round to me and said er, well we had an argument and he says 'at least I got a dad, at least mine's not rotting away and gonna die anytime soon'. So I just hit him (laughs). And I, I got done for it but I, I got excluded for like three weeks and everything but he weren't allowed back in school… And er basically, since he had said that, my anger through school, it's like, I always thought people's gonna judge me for dad's illness. I had the mick taken out of me. Er this one lad at school, I had a bruise all day down the side of my face, er 'cause he said something about my dad like I went to hit him and then two of his mates hit me, like booted all my face down there and everything. So I haven't really had much luck.*

Here, is the first time we see Tom in Revenger mode. Tom has been wrongfully treated, and responding in the way he feels is right (Spruin, Canter, Youngs & Coulston, 2014). Instead of an act of mindless violence, Tom constructs the events as 'crimes of passion'. It was the right and appropriate course of action in retaliating for objective cruelties.

Later in the interview, Tom arrives at the reason for his suspended sentence. Here again he draws on the discourse of his father's illness to give context to his own violence.

> *This was two years ago now. I was 16, 17. The guy, he was 32, 33. Being a child then, er, my best mate er, she died of cancer, and his dad got cancer and he, he's, I think he's got 5 weeks left now, erm, something like that, and like my dad had it, and like he turned round to me and says, 'oh, your dad got it too, I hope he dies', like, 'alright then, we'll see about that', so I just started hitting him and he, he kicked all back and everything but I stopped breathing and I just used that as like anger, so I was, couldn't breathe, so like I was putting all like my strength in to hurting him. And I stamped all down his face, er, dislodged all his eye-socket, er, dis, dislodged his muscle all in his back and everything and er, he was just lying there and his eyes rolled to the back of his head and I thought I killed him. And I didn't know what to do, and then two minutes later I got arrested. And erm, the one after that my dad, he was going in hospital and I hadn't heard nothing off him all day. Usually he rings*

me in the morning when he gets there, er when he's on his break, erm, and then just as he's leaving. And I didn't hear nothing from him throughout the day and I didn't know if he was having operations or what, and I didn't know if I was going to see him that night or anything, and er, this lad started saying that I was a prick and everything and I was just like, 'just leave me alone, I'm not in the mood with it. I, I, I'm in a bad mood as it is, I'm upset, so just leave me'. Everyone was telling him to stop it and he carried on saying 'oh he's a fag, he won't fight me. He, he won't touch me.' And I went 'oh, I'll kill him'. Walked up to him and goes 'go on then, hit me'. He, he went, he clenched his fist and went to pull it back, I hit him five times, four or five times and I bust all his nose. He got me arrested for that.

Again Tom reappears in Revenger mode. He has once again been wronged, and once again he must redress the injustice. Violence is made understandable, as there was literally no other choice for Tom. As such, his criminal culpability is severely mitigated.

A conflict of identities

Though Tom's 'victim' and Revenger identities are strong narrative contenders, there is another of Tom's identities that is important here, that of 'hard-man'. This first emerges through a story Tom tells of a random attack by a group of unknown assailants whilst walking to his cousin's house one night. The attack is explained in three parts. The first involves an ambush with two lads coming "out of the bush" and "bricking" his face. The second involves three others stamping down on him. And the third, two further attackers emerge at the bottom of his road, causing him further harm. Surviving to tell the tale, whilst getting a few punches in himself, functions to construct Tom as someone who can 'take it'.

Tom's telling of this story is interesting. Though he is once again the victim of aggressive others, the severity of the attack and the number of attackers is a signal to his inner masculinity. He is not simply the target of individual bullies, he is the survivor of multi-aggressor, ultra-violence. As described earlier in this chapter, such gestures of masculinity are also seen in Tom's account of being challenged to a fight over social media. And it is here where Canter and co.'s (Canter, 2009; Youngs & Canter, 2012; Spruin, Canter, Youngs & Coulston, 2014) Hero narrative role might be found. Despite showing no interest in fighting his tormenter, Tom shows up anyway. As he comments, "I'm only proving that I'm not scared…". His pride directs him to meet and overcome the challenge, which in line with the characteristics of Hero, he does with great bravado and nonchalance. As he states of his thoughts at the time, "I was just standing there. I wasn't in the mind to go and kick the crap out of him". As he and his friend walk away after his bully fails to show, he

has achieved his mission in gaining recognition (Canter, 2009, p.2 73). Notably though, despite such displays of machismo, Tom once again manages to avoid an aggressor identity by staunchly maintaining his victimhood. Though he makes it clear he is someone not to be messed with, he is not like his tormenting others. He was simply standing up to bullies. Rather than expose Tom's unpredictable violence, the story underlines his strength of character. He is now narratively placed as victim, hard-man and hero all in one story.

5.4 Managing bad feelings

Managing bad feelings was a constant task for the young men. Their narratives often took them to places where they had to present themselves in ways that were not favourable. This, in turn, required ways to manage this so as not so spoil valued (usually, moral) identities. Jacobs & Copes (2015, p.281-288) suggest that when offenders are confronted with wrongdoings, the way they explain their actions becomes a way of "maintaining a particular sense of self". As such, though aberrant and morally deficient acts might be committed, they can be framed in ways which minimise risks to personal identity. A particularly interesting example of this is found in the story Jon tells of hitting his sister.

> *I was at my house yeah, and I was with [G] yeah, and then obviously she was drinking some juice yeah and I pour, I must have poured it out yeah and filled it with water and put it back in the fridge yeah, just taking, just taking the piss yeah, and she drank it and she was like, she started riling up 'what the fuck, what the fuck' like, this ain't my juice and then she come to me obviously I was like, 'yeah, yeah, yeah, I'll get you another juice, yeah', but she was like, she just weren't having it, she just started riling up and obviously just 'cause I was in front of [G], I was like, I just like I dunno, I gave her, I gave her a little slap yeah, I know it's a bit, I know it's a bit wrong yeah, I gave her a slap and then from there I weren't really talking to her, innit. I've only. I've only just started talking to since I've come out like.*

Jon works hard to minimise guilty feelings here. Rather than explain it as a significant act of violence, it constructs it as "a little slap". And in managing the bad feelings that come with it, describes it as "a bit wrong". Indeed, though the act was obviously hugely significant for both Jon and his sister, indeed, it resulted in them not speaking for years after, it is presented a something that came out of relatively nothing.

Keenan also works hard to manage bad feelings around family issues. In particular, the fact he doesn't see his son. Rather than any failing of his own however, he explains his

absence in his son's life as the result of the problems between his current girlfriend and his former girlfriend.

> *I can't go there because, he's my son but I have to keep everyone else kind of happy like so I have to try and find a happy medium and like some people were saying like "he's your son, you should put him first" but I can't bring him in to a hostile environment where like people like, like they're not gonna be hostile towards him but it's like, oh, it's, it'd be like, I'm trying to think how I can put it, it would be, 'cause if I was to go and meet, meet my son's mum to get my son and then bring him back to mine, my girlfriend's gonna know I went to meet her, so that's already gonna put her back up.*

Keenan suggests keeping away to be the best course of action. Playing with discourses of child protection, he chooses but then quickly rejects notions of unsafe "hostile" environments as a reason for this, opting instead to underline his lack of power. For Keenan, the guilt of doing to his own child what his mother did to him is avoided as he is able to claim a position where he is just trying to keep everyone happy.

Of all the young men however, Jamal seemed the one who struggled most in managing the parts of himself that he did not like. It is useful to explore this in looking at his narrative as a whole.

A case study: Jamal and the management of good and bad selves

Jamal's story is one of moral redemption. It is the tale of the prodigal son. Reflecting his his habitus as a middle-class, young man, from a "good Asian family", Jamal's narrative is about his journey towards reclaiming a moral identity, both as a good and loving son, a reformed alcoholic, and a hard-working and law-abiding citizen. In considering Jamal's narrative as a coherent product, it is useful to refer back to the drawing task as a visual reminder of how he constructs his world (see Figure 2, p.102). In the first of two drawings, Jamal draws a detailed timeline. All the major events of his life are accounted for. The timeline is also split in to two colours, each occupying moral polarities, good family/bad friends; good driving/bad drinking; good experiences with education and training/bad criminal activity. Jamal's use of colour also functions as significant, red to signal the bad and blue to signal the good. As he comments, "red is always associated with danger. These are dangerous times". Jamal places prison as transformative. He is coming out "a better person", ready to "sort his life out". In his current status, he is actively engaging in

desistance through pursuing the traditional rehabilitative goals of engaging in education, training and employment. This established, he is ready to begin his story.

Jamal's narrative follows almost exactly in line with the redemption scripts of Maruna's (2001) desisters. Given this, it is important to consider more closely what these scripts look like, and how they operate. Desisters, Maruna argues, often have much to explain. Many have formally renounced their criminal behaviours, but have subsequently returned to offending *after* having announced their reform to authorities and important others. As such, they have need of a "believable story" (p.86). Their desistance must be logical. Typical scripts, Maruna contends, will connect negative past experiences to the present in a way that the present good is inevitable (p.87). Quoting O'Reilly (1997), Maruna notes that constructing a bad past as meaningful is "a necessary prelude" (O'Reilly, 1997, p.24, cited in Maruna, 2001, p.87). What is in the present is a product of what has gone before. Maruna also talks of the preservation of a sense of identity "avoiding the 'schizophrenic' rejecting of one identity and the taking up of another i.e. "the real me" (p.87). As described in chapter 2 of this thesis, it is the place where individuals saw themselves as intrinsically good, but having done bad things. The former identity is due to circumstances "accidental" (p.10). The new identity is what was there all along. These scripts of redemption are fundamentally about returning to an essential goodness, and finding purpose and meaning along the way. As Maruna notes, "by making good, not only is the ex-offender "changed" but he/she is also reconstituted" (p.10).

Jamal's story starts with a passionate account of his happy, and by all accounts rather idyllic childhood. He goes to great lengths to showcase his "very good upbringing", his "excellent" childhood, and his loving, supportive family.

> *…everyone's sort of really supportive and stuff, really good looking after, they take care of you, they buy you stuff, really good excellent childhood, nothing wrong. I know you get the little broken families and stuff like that and whatnot, we never had an issue like that, ever, no arguments, everyone was happy.*

Notable here is Jamal's introduction and then immediate rejection of the notion of "broken families". Seemingly reflecting his awareness of sociocultural arguments linking familial dysfunctionality and crime (made by bodies such as the CJS, the education system, and social services), Jamal makes it clear that this is not relevant in his case. Other families are broken (and here we might assume he refers to the families of other offenders), but not

his. Given the timing of these interviews, (taking place as they did in early 2012), it is also possible this terminology was a product of Jamal's internalisation of David Cameron's 2010 pre-election sound-bite of "Broken Britain". Being heavily involved with the CJS system from 2009 onwards (as Jamal was), he would almost certainly have been contact with institutional discourses suggesting this to be the case.

As part of the many opportunities afforded by having a loving and supportive family, Jamal also identifies his educational advantage. For example, he talked at length of his older sisters' joint successes in higher education, (their "degrees" and subsequent "great jobs"), and how in turn that provided him invaluable extra tutelage. Due to this, Jamal was able to achieve results which were "above expectations" (eight A*-C grade GCSE passes), and subsequently attract a "good income" job as a marker researcher. Unlike the socioeconomic backgrounds typically attached to offenders (and in particular, those who have been to prison), Jamal makes it clear he had every opportunity. His task in establishing his "goodness and conventionality" (Maruna, 2001, p.87) done, he is safely able to move on to his change of path. Narratively speaking, he arrives at his criminal turning point.

Laub & Sampson (2003) explain turning points as "an alteration or deflection in a long-term pathway or trajectory that was initiated at an earlier point in time" (Sampson and Laub 2005, 16). What makes a turning point a turning point, "rather than a minor ripple" (Carlsson, 2012, p.3) is the amount of 'sufficient time' that is spent on following the new course. For Sampson & Laub (2005, pp.17-18), turning points, to various degrees, involve, (1) new situations that 'knife off' the past from the present, (2) new situations that provide both supervision and monitoring as well as new opportunities of social support and growth, (3) new situations that change and structure routine activities, and (4) new situations that provide the opportunity for identity transformation (ibid). For Jamal, this particular turning point 'knifed off' his "excellent childhood" from his criminal present. He faced new situations that saw a focus on hedonism and crime, rather than education and career, and finally he saw a shift in identity from 'good boy' to 'party boy/criminal'. Of note, these are the very things he highlights in his timeline. Jamal's particular turning point is explained through the lens of two contributing and related factors, 1) his burgeoning young adulthood and 2) being subsequently drawn in to an environment conducive to crime. At

this first narrative change of direction, he draws on the familiar "transition to adulthood" discourse in explaining himself.

> *…that's the time I think everyone's starts learning more about the wider side of life. You're 16, you sort of feel like you're allowed to do whatever you want now, and start trying to be independent and stuff*

Here, Jamal's investment seems to be in normalising teenage rebellion. He states his interest in engaging with "the wider side of life", as a normal and natural part of asserting independence from one's family. Everyone does it. Interestingly, this technique seems to function as a precursory explanation for his later diversion into criminality. This is particularly apparent later in the narrative when he argues that "everyone's gotta experience something to know what the consequences are".

As part of this period, Jamal came in regular contact with drugs and alcohol. This was significant as not only did it mark the beginning of his pathway towards alcoholism, it also sat ill at ease with his "real me" (Maruna, 2001) as a well behaved Asian boy and faithful Muslim. Jamal's describes his alcohol use as incremental. First social drinking with friends, then regular private drinking episodes, and finally progressing on to a dependence that saw him drinking "litres of vodka a day". It also became an accomplice to, and later trigger for, his crimes (i.e. drink driving and drug-dealing). In seeking to redistribute uncomfortable feelings about this, Jamal positions himself as a victim of his social environment. This is immediately observable in his explanation of how he first started drinking.

> *I used to hang out with the wrong people, people that were doing bad stuff. I never, every time my friends used to drink and take drugs, marijuana or stuff I used to say, 'oh idiots, you don't, you don't need that to enjoy yourself, look at me!' and stuff like that. And you know what. Around that sort of age, just after I passed my driving test I thought I'd try it. So one day I got drunk and I liked it and I sort of took it from there.*

Jamal talks of his inauguration into 'bad behaviour' as being the product of hanging out with "the wrong people". Though he does not explicitly claim peer-pressure, he certainly leaves the door open for that possibility. Moreover, to underline how incongruous it is with his "real me", he describes his initial resistance to it. He plays with discourses of piety, "you don't need that to enjoy yourself, look at me". Though he admits he liked it, and decided himself to carry on, the overarching message is clear. His initiation was external, a product

of his social environment. This established, Jamal is then able to shake off some responsibility for it.

Culpability is sidestepped again in how Jamal explains his subsequent alcoholism. Though he can place some blame elsewhere for starting drinking, that does not account for his continued drinking. It is here that Jamal draws on the discourse of "alcoholism as a controlling addiction". Maruna (2001) draws on George Herbert Mead's the "*I"* and the *"Me",* and a related concept of the *"It".* He explains the "I" as the self-as-subject, "the I who acts, does and chooses", and the "Me" is the self-as-object, "the Me who is known observed and blamed" (p.93). The "It", added to this framework by Petrunik & Shearing (1988), is however external. It is responsible for behaviour considered unintentional, unpredictable, and uncontrollable (Maruna, 2001, p.89). Redemption scripts operate by othering, or externalising uncomfortable or unwelcome aspects of an individual's past. Specifically, that which contravenes the narrator's essential goodness. These are not part of the "real self" but are products of the environment. This is a point that Jamal is keen to make. The occurrence of the "It" was particularly notable in Jamal's many references to his alcoholism. Rather than any particular force of his own desire, the drink dictates and directs his behaviour. As Maruna notes, the addiction itself becomes "endowed with the ability to "do" things" (p.93). For example, whilst talking about his angry, and sometimes abusive behaviour towards his family and his girlfriend, Jamal proclaims, "it was the drink really. I mean I can't do that to someone when I'm sober". The notion of alcohol controlling him, rather than the other way round, is again observable later in Jamal's narrative. In considering whether or not his drinking was out of the ordinary, he muses:

> *…my drinking, I wouldn't call it social… It was more like, it started off low, once a week, twice a week and built up gradually three times a week. Once you get to that stage, three or four times a week, it is pretty frequent in a week, your body starts building tolerance. You need more to get drunk, you just don't get drunk from a little bottle no more, or a few shots, so you start drinking more. And then it becomes that sort of lifestyle where it's every day thing, where it's normal for you really.*

Not for the first time, Jamal reverts to using second person, 'this is what happens in such circumstances'. By taking this approach, he again appears to exempt himself from agency. He had no choice. He is once again determined by that which is outside of him. This way of framing things is apparent another time when describing his turn to crime *because* of this dependency on alcohol. As he announces, "they give you £7 a day to live on. You can't

afford an alcohol habit like that". His criminality is, as such, constructed as both logical and understandable.

Interestingly, when it came to Jamal's desistance from drinking, a sudden and notable change of position is observable. After establishing himself as a victim of his social environment in terms of the breaking of his abstinence and his later alcoholism, Jamal begins to talk from a position of free will.

> *And I realised there's no point, there's no point. I had access to drugs and alcohol inside prison, I just thought I don't (inaudible) 'I don't need it, I don't need it'. I'm giving myself a break.*

Considering the lengths Jamal goes to in explaining how controlled he was by alcohol, the sudden change in his ability to "give [him]self a break" is noteworthy.

Jamal's final task in navigating good and bad selves occurs in how he accounts for being sent to prison. Similar to several of the other young men, Jamal explains his time in prison as affording him time to think. Notably, that thinking brought him to the conclusion that he was not like those around him. Though, as explored previously, he worked hard to be accepted as "one of the guys", not backing down and taking a battering if necessary, on the outside it was a different story. He no longer wants to be in the in-group. Drawing once again on Fleetwood's ideas (2015; 2016), it didn't fit with his habitus as a middle-class Asian boy, from a "good family". As he says at one point:

> *Some people living out on the streets where they actually commit crime to go inside prison 'cause then they don't, they've got detox thing in, where I was, where they actually give drugs and alcohol sedatives, a legal form of it. People go in there, they get free drugs, know what I'm saying, so, so stuff like that. And other people are just, I dunno, heartless people like they're doing 28 years, but you still see them out on the landing, like it don't phase them. And stuff like that, but I don't think prison's for me.*

Though he is in prison, prison is not *for* him. Though he is receiving drug and alcohol support, *he* is not a chancer looking to get "free drugs". He is, by his own implication, better than that. As he says himself in conclusion to this story, "I'm not that type of a person. I got too much, too much to miss, too much to lose". In establishing himself as part of the 'in-group' of conventionality, he chooses life (Maruna, 2001, p.108)

5.4.1 The use of humour

Managing bad, sad and uncomfortable feelings was also found in the young men's use of humour. For example, Jon draws on this technique as he explains about meeting his best friend. As the story goes, he lent his bike to a friend and then saw someone else ride off with it. Though he gave chase, the other lad quickly cycled away. The 'funny' turn of the story was that the friend who Jon had originally given permission to use his bike, had then gone on to lend it to another of *his* friends. An event that was then witnessed by Jon. Though the anecdote itself is told in high spirits, there are other possible readings of it. For example, that Jon was forced to helplessly watch as his bike was being stolen, whilst subsequently finding out that he had actually been let down by the original friend who took advantage of his good nature. Indeed, given how much value Jon places on money and things, *and* his negative reactions to those things not being treated considerately, the story of the theft of his bike being constructed as humour is interesting. It is possible that Jon made the story a humorous one in order to protect from potential bad feelings about a much-loved friend.

Humour can perform a number of functions in its deployment in story-telling. For example, for individuals experiencing stressful, and/or risk-filled situations, humour can help to relieve anxiety (Dickinson & Wright, 2017; Martens, 2004). For those uncertain, worried or recounting experiences of trauma, it can exert control and help with resistance to being controlled (e.g. Powell and Paton, 1988, cited in Sandberg & Tutenges, 2018). Humour can also enhance in-group solidarity and out-group hostility (Gruner, 2000), *and* enable the positive reframing or reinterpretation of (negative or unwelcome) past and present circumstances (Dickinson & Wright, 2017). In effect, humour can function to make threatening situations safe. This use of humour was very apparent in Craig's narrative.

A case study: Craig and the armour of the funny man

Craig's key narrative identity was one of a happy go-lucky guy who had experienced misfortune but wasn't that bothered by it. Unlike Kyle however, the bad and sad of his past wasn't demonstrated through measured stoicism. It was framed as gallows humour. As Craig so often commented, it "makes me laugh". Sandberg & Tutenges (2018, p.3) note, laughter is "not necessarily a sign of humor". This seemed highly evident in Craig's

account of his life. Indeed, it was the rhetorical function of Craig's narratives, rather than the narratives themselves, that stood out as most significant.

The first story Craig tells concerns his daughter, and specifically his battle to get access to seeing her (as depicted in Figure 8, p.110). It is here that his humorous take on life first appears.

> *C: I couldn't tell you [about his daughter]. I don't see her anymore. That's what I'm doing after this, going to the solicitors.*
>
> *KD: Mmm, what's happening then?*
>
> *C: Oh well, 'cause I got sent to jail and everything and then I got recalled for a violent offence so they're sayin' I'm too violent to see her, just 'cause I beat up four lads by myself, it's just stupid. It's just makes me laugh. (Laughs). It proper makes me laugh. It's just ridiculous (laughs again).*

Craig's proclamation of comedy is obviously rhetorical. It is a figure of speech. It would be a significant stretch to argue he did find this all hilarious, particularly given the outcome of the fight meant he was then unable to then see his child. The question then is, what purpose does this use of humour serve? Principally, it seems to be a way of offering a point of defence - a mechanism with which he can purge negative emotions (Freud [1905] 1960, cited in Sandberg & Tutenges (2018, p.3). Dickinson & Wright (2017) talk about humour being used in similar ways to reduce perceived threat. By staging stories that provoke particularly unwelcome emotions as funny, circumstances can be made less threatening and more manageable (p.705). By engaging humour in his narrative, Craig is able to keep a comfortable emotional distance.

This 'humour as a defence mechanism' is seen again in the interview where he tells the story of growing up with four brothers. He talks of the laughs he had learning to "punch back" especially, as he comments, "being the youngest". Here, fighting is normalised. Rather than an account of older sibling violence, it becomes an amusing anecdote of how brothers are. Humour also operates to redistribute his own guilt. This can be seen as he talks of the crime he was sent to prison for:

> *Arson, recklessness. I was off my head and I set fire to me own front room thinking I was on a campfire… mashed out me head (laughs).*

The inevitable chaos and devastation, not to mention risk to life, that burning down his own house must have caused is framed as a funny story about a time he got wasted. In both stories, he is able to communicate events but without too much emotional fallout.

Craig's Jack-the-lad persona is also in narratives relating to his bad behaviour. He develops this first through his stories of being a "little shit" as a younger teenager, "terrorising" his family. It is picked up again in his narrative of being a tearaway at school.

> *C: Oh they couldn't, they couldn't handle me, (laughs). They hated me.*
>
> *KD: What were you like in class then?*
>
> *C: Me?*
>
> *KD: Were you a chatter or were you a…?*
>
> *C: Nah, I was a destructive little (laughs), anything just to get them to send me out the classroom.*

Sandberg & Tutenges (2018, p.2) discuss Hobbes' work around Superiority Theory, describing laughter as an expression of disdain towards other people or towards one's former self. Here Craig is seen expressing superiority over who he used to be. Though seemingly enjoying the memories of his mischievous younger self, he is older and wiser now. As he claims later in the narrative, he has now "matured past that".

However, there were notable instances where humour was absent, and a different identity emerged. This occurred when Craig talked about his experiences with the Probation Service (see section 5.6. for further discussion on this). In answer to a question about whether criminal justice professionals drew unfair conclusions about him, he comments:

> *They've been drawn for me, they always do. They judge you before they actually even know you, do you know what I mean, 'cause I'm nothing like that. I can be, don't get me wrong, I can be like but I'd rather not to be, if you know what I mean. It just makes me laugh.*

Though he overtly sets himself up as this happy-go-lucky, Jack-the-lad type, here he unequivocally rejects it. When it comes to moving forward, his former identity as a "naughty boy" is constructed as holding him back.

5.5 Friendships, desistance and discourses of maturity

As with most people, friendships and relationships were a big feature of the young men's lives. Each told a number of stories and anecdotes about best friends, girlfriends and acquaintances ranging from the humorous to the tragic. As explored earlier, friends were often placed as the reason for the young men's criminality, but their significance was more than just that. Friendships shaped how the young men made sense of the world e.g. how they forged moral identities, and how they navigated priorities. Friendships were also placed as the motivators for future action, particularly when it came to plans for desistance.

5.5.1 Loyalty and betrayal: Inside and outside the prison walls

Accounts of loyalty and betrayal were littered throughout the young men's narratives. This was particularly when it came to friendships and relationships before and after prison. Being inside for longer periods of time meant friendships often broke down. Not being able to connect with their social networks in the same way as they had before was a source of frustration, and all too often, friends just stopped visiting. The consequences of this typically produced anger and bitterness from those concerned. This was unfortunately the case for Jamal and Kyle. As Jamal says in summarising his feelings about friendships,

> *Take your five fingers and chop three of them off and maybe two of them you can say yeah, you can count on them. Really and truly you can count on them. I only had one visit from friends when I was in prison and that was two of my friends, who was my close friends, and that was it. No-one else.*

When asked how he felt about the situation, Jamal comments,

> *I was angry, yes. I was angry, the fact that you're phoning someone and they're not picking up your phone call… you write them a letter, they won't write to me back.*

Kyle expressed a similar anger due to his friends' absences during his prison time. In his case, the betrayal stung even more as his friends had promised to maintain contact when he was inside. As such, their concern for his wellbeing was placed as false and performative.

> *'Cause obviously I was on trial and that and I got remanded and so they all knew, and they all turned up, the court was absolutely packed with friends and that and they were all saying 'yeah we'll write, we'll write' and they did write, they did write for the first two year or whatever but after that it sort of stopped. And five and a half years down the line I'm coming out and they're trying to be my friend again like. I'm not having that. Fuck that. Yeah, can't, it's nice that they did write for a little while but there's no need to stop is there? Just a letter a month or so just to let me know they're alright, what know what they're doing and that. But they didn't bother so I ain't gonna bother. I ain't making the effort for people that couldn't be bothered to do it for me.*

Significantly, Kyle seeing former friends also brought with it certain risks. Aware of his anger as the trigger to his criminality, (it was his enraged violence that saw him commit his crime), he states the importance of keeping away from his previous social circle in order to protect his pathway towards desistance. As he explains of seeing old faces on the estate,

> *Like, if I say to them 'you fucking can't talk to me, you prick. You didn't write for so many years, so don't act like we're mates now' and they get a bit funny I'm just gonna fucking hit 'em, aren't I. And that's gonna end up getting me in to trouble and I just end up back in the same place again.*

This effect has also been noted by Miller, Carbone-Lopez & Gunderman (2015, p.88). In research amongst recovering women methamphetamine users, the authors note the women often needed to separate from romantic relationships which perpetuated continued drug misuse. This was especially important when those relationships were seen to counter particular desirable identities e.g. the good mother role. In the case of Kyle, in order to avoid inevitable future harm, and returning to a criminal self, Kyle actively distances himself from the situations and people which he sees as having criminogenic potential.

Along with betrayals however, came loyalties. This was, again, an important feature for both Kyle and Jamal. Interestingly, loyalty for both young men manifested in the form of a loving girlfriend. Kyle, for example, in setting out his plans for desistance includes his current relationship. He explains his intention to, "keep my head down, spend time with the girlfriend and that". When questioned about how long they have been together he explains it as only being a matter of weeks (he had, of course, only just recently left prison). However, her importance as a potential long-term girlfriend was explained in terms of her loyalty. As Kyle says,

> *she was the first person I spoke to when I got out, like she got in touch straight away. She was like "oh how you doing" and that. She always wrote to me. Through my whole sentence.*

Unlike the absent friends, his girlfriend, in her tireless commitment to staying in contact with Kyle throughout his prison stay, proved her worthiness.

The faithful and loving girlfriend narrative was also played out in Jamal's life-story. Jamal referenced his girlfriend frequently, and in particular, lauded her for what she offered him in terms of complete and utter loyalty. In bringing this to life, he drew on a particular event of her standing up for him when he was attacked by a large group of other young men.

> *…I told her just to go. I gave her £10 and I told her "baby, call a cab and go, get out of here" but she didn't. She actually jumped in the middle of it and she did take a few blows herself as well. I mean those, those sort of stuff, I mean you just know, that person must really care about you.*

The event produced further endorsements of her good character including her generosity, giving him money "even when she has got little money herself", getting a tattoo of his name, and being sexually faithful, "I haven't had an issue with her going around my back". Perhaps most importantly is her long-term commitment. Even when Jamal was in prison, she visited him regularly, "buying me stuff too". She was, in every way, worthy of his love and most significantly, his reciprocated loyalty.

5.5.2 Friends, maturity and moving on

Friends however were also described as something needed to be moved on from. Given that most of the young men were invested in desistance pathways, age, maturity and leaving younger criminal days behind was a confirmed feature of their narratives. As Jamal comments,

> *It's not worth it. I'm not exactly young no more. I'm getting old, to be honest with you. My little days are over.*

Interestingly, Jamal also frames being out of his criminal friendship group as a symbolic 'sigh of relief'. As he says of what might have been, "god knows what fish I'd be frying right about now". Indeed, as the young men so often intimated, 'it could have been worse'.

Darnel also explained needing to leave his friends behind. For him though, it was in a lack of fit. It was no longer congruent with his new identity of 'professional working man'

D: …now like, like the kind of circumstances have changed with me kind of going jail and then coming out and now working and stuff. And most of them are kind of doing the same thing we was doing when we were younger, so, so there isn't really kind of that much time for, time for us to kind of see each other that much.

KD: What, because of what they're doing or what you're doing?

D: I think that, um that, like a bit of both. I think it's the kind of thing where they're doing what they're doing, which takes up their time and I'm doing what I'm doing which takes up my time…. if they go somewhere like it's going to be, like in the morning and then when they come back it will be really late at night. So, when I finished work I don't really wanna go, go and like chill with friends. Like I'd rather go home and like watch TV or go to sleep, so there's not really, like there hasn't been that much time to kind of like see everyone that much.

Hill, Blokland & van der Geest (2016, p.522) in their research into desistance in emerging adulthood note, "the more time emerging adults spend in adult roles, the less delinquent behavior they engage in". Though this might well be the case for Darnel, he certainly saw himself as transitioning into a more adult self, it is also possible that his pragmatic approach to life just didn't see how it would work in practice. As he was so fond of stating, trying to mix the exuberance of youthful crime with the responsibilities of an adult working life, just didn't really "make sense". However, when it came to claiming independence, it was Gary who was the most insistent.

A case study: Gary's pathways to independence

Gary was highly invested in promoting an adult identity. It permeated through his narrative. He talked often of his independence and self-sufficiency, able as he was to always "look after [him]self". As he says of being homed in to his own place after leaving prison for the first time,

I've always been quite mature for my age, really. And like you just, you have to get independent like, once you live on your own you have to like grow up… it changes everything, doesn't it?

In celebrating the benefits of independent living, Gary sites social freedom as a particularly valued one. You can listen to your music without anyone telling you to "turn it down". Friends can come over without you having to ask permission, and you can bring your girlfriend home "whenever you want". Most importantly, there are no parents there to

“moan at” you. When asked whether he would move back home after leaving the hostel he replies, “I couldn’t live back with my parents, it’s a hassle”. Indeed, Gary levelled many of his complaints of being *denied* an adult identity on the rules and restrictions of family living. Importantly, Gary also makes it clear that it was his *choice* to live independently. As he explains, “I could go back to my mum’s if I wanted to…she’d let me like, but I don’t want to”. Though he could easily opt for the safe route of parental security, Gary instead chooses the challenge of personal responsibility.

Gary’s discourses of independence and self sufficiency were also expressed through stories of self-care, especially cooking. He talked of rising to the challenge of learning how to prepare his own meals without the safety blanket of his mother to do it for him. As he says of tackling unfamiliar recipes, it’s not hard to do, “you just follow instructions don’t you”. Independence, in Gary’s world view, offered growth through self directed learning. His ‘transition to adulthood’ narrative also drew on the discourse of ‘growing out of things’. Though he formally enjoyed his status as the baby of the family due to being “spoilt rotten” because he was “so cute”, he rejects it in his adulthood. Being spoilt is constructed as a privilege and condition of childhood. In addition, in discussing his recent decision not to see his birth father again, Gary claims, “there was no point, ‘cause I’m old now”. Parents, conceivably, only have a function when we are young. Interestingly, though he makes distinctions between his older and younger self, he equally places independence as a facet of who he was even as a child. For example, he tells a story of how, aged eight, he used to walk a considerable distance to the park and back with his friends. As he claims, “we used to do it every day like, when we weren’t at school”. It was, as the implication stands, just in his nature to be that way.

Gary’s investment in telling stories which saw him ‘performing adult’ seemed significant. Though there are of course many possibilities, one plausible one might reside in what his early entry to prison asked of him. When talking about being sent to a YOI aged 16 he comments, “I wasn’t scared… I just didn’t wanna be away from home for so long”. Though most of his stories were about not needing anyone else, here Gary presents himself for the first time as vulnerable. Considering this in the context of the now, it is possible that Gary’s drive to independence was not just a matter of choice, but also a matter of need. He *had* to grow up. As he later adds on the possibility of going back, “I wouldn’t be scared now like when I was a kid”. Indeed, in claiming an adult status, Gary assures himself emotional indemnity.

5.6 Institutions, processes and control

One of the most notable features of the young men's narratives was in their constructions of the systems and institutions that scaffolded their lives. These not only included the various components of the CJS e.g. the police, the Probation Service, parole, etc., (though this was perhaps understandably their main focus), but also other bodies, such as the education system, social services, mental health services, and of course the YAO organisations. All 10 of the young men had things to say about their experiences within these wider social structures, with each presenting a clear argument for how they had impacted on their lives. For some, there was resistance. For others, a beleaguered acceptance. And for one, a total belief in what those systems were trying to achieve.

5.6.1 Rage against the machine

Gary, Craig, and Jamal were prime examples of those who resisted institutions and processes. Though it wasn't an all or nothing situation, some services were constructed as useful and viable, this group were the most vociferous in their criticism of the ones they saw to be blocking them (for whatever reason). In all three cases, their frustration and fury when it came to social institutions was almost entirely focussed on probation. It is useful to start with Jamal in exploring this matter.

Jamal's overall narrative was about moral redemption. As discussed earlier in this chapter, he structured his entire story around it. Though he was largely able to achieve this through engaging with discourses of regret, remorse and culpability, and importantly in accessing the validations of those who supported him in his quest to reclaim a moral self (e.g. his family, his girlfriend, and the YAO charities), problems were encountered when he met with individuals and services who did not have preserving his moral goodness as their primary concern. Indeed, one particularly interesting narrative centred on Jamal's account of his problematic relationship with a former probation officer. As he describes it:

> *[He's] always used to be bothering me. Always, always. 'Oh how's the drinking going? This, that…' And it's the way they actually talk to you about it. There's a sort of nice way of asking someone, 'ok have you made any progress with your drink?' If not, you're not afraid to tell them the truth and you're not thinking 'oh shall I lie to them and tell them something different just in case they might have a go at me' and*

> *stuff like that. Yeah so I didn't really like him. He was always trying to force me, 'do this, do that, go apply for jobs, go apply for training'. He was like more or less making my decisions for me.*

In explaining this, he contrasts it with his experiences with his *current* probation officer.

> *Um the lady sort of is better than my other probation worker, where she's not so intimidating. She actually praises me for what I'm doing at the moment and she actually thinks that it's good that I'm doing this… Yeah just go and see her and I ask her, 'how you doing [A], are you alright?', 'yeah, how about yourself, tell me some good news', I'm like 'yeah I've been doing OK, I'm been going there, I've been doing that, busy, same stuff, I've been working and stuff like that' 'oh okay, good stuff, good stuff, I'm really proud to hear that' and stuff like that and 'oh alright, I'll see you in two weeks then. Take care of yourself.' That's about it really.*

Whether or not these reflected typical conversations seems less the issue. It is more about what the telling of these particular stories conveys - specifically, Jamal's resistance to a system which has the power to place him as bad. In this example, 'nice' probation officer is friendly, encouraging and praises Jamal. She asks the right questions, and creates a pleasant, professional environment. Jamal is therefore able to preserve his inner goodness, his "real me" (Maruna, 2001). However, 'nasty' probation officer is "intimidating", confrontational and bothersome. He forces Jamal to do things before he is ready, and constantly questions him. We also see an intimidating bully-type, who makes Jamal "afraid" to tell the truth. Though his assertion, "there's a sort of nice way of asking", is arguably a fair enough point, what seems to be 'nasty' probation officer's biggest failing is that he treats Jamal like an offender. This is an identity position which Jamal is singularly uninterested in occupying.

Gary too communicates a fractured and combative relationship with probation. Where prison was said to be unpleasant, it was simultaneously constructed as a valuable learning experience. It "made [him] into the person [he] is today". Probation, however, appeared to have no discernible function other than to cause aggravation and distress. Gary describes immense frustration with supervisory meetings where he was continually doubted, and mistrusted as to the truth of his claims to be desisting from crime. Rather than being a useful process, probation experiences were constructed as unhelpful, "they think the meetings do you good, but they don't", aggressive, "they just have a go at you", and persecutory. Like Jamal, he understands there is a job to do but, as Gary says, "there's doing your job, and there's…". The sentence hangs open, but the implication is clear.

Gary's main complaint with the Probation Service seems to reside in its lack of faith in his rehabilitated status, and the related frustration in having to continually evidence his reformed ways. As he explains, "you can't just say 'oh yeah, I've changed'. You need to prove yourself". Proving his desistance, however, was particularly complex for Gary. Given his history of crime and violence, and in particular a "little slip up" which saw him being recalled to prison, he was classified as high risk of reoffending. Though he stated having finally made the decision to stop committing crime, he was reliant on that course of action being accepted by others, which was a route which he found continually closed to him.

> *But say if you honestly, you have changed, every time you're going to a probation meeting, and they're drilling it in to your head 'you've done this, you've done that, you're a menace to society, you're a criminal and you're a waste of space, that's all you're ever gonna be', 'cause sometimes that's how they make it out. They try and say it's all about rehabilitation but half the time it's not.*

Victor & Waldram (2015), in their research into the newly claimed identities of post-treatment sex offenders, talk about such identities being as much a matter of reconciling essentialist public discourses (about the nature of sex offenders), as it is a private matter of conceptualising the self as changed (p.97). As they comment, to be successful (in this instance, success being marked by community reintegration) such offenders must adapt their own moral habilitation "to an unruly social world that fails to blindly accept shared notions of prosociality…" (p.118). And indeed, this seemed to be the case with Gary. Though he is certain of his reformed character, as he says, "I'm not a criminal. I'm just a normal citizen now", he is forced to accept that he cannot demand this of others. He is, much to his chagrin, completely dependent on the validation of the state as to whether or not he might reclaim a law-abiding identity.

Importantly here, in both Jamal and Gary's cases, is the underlying assumption about what the Probation Service is and does. Returning back to Gary's quote from before, he says at the end, "they try and say it's all about rehabilitation, but half the time it's not". Though Gary seems to not realise this, his assertion (meant as a slight) is in fact entirely correct. Though rehabilitation absolutely forms a part of the service as delivered through interventions, programmes and Rehabilitation Activity Requirements (RARs), the Probation Service has the management of risk at the core of its practice. Indeed, case management staff[22] are trained substantially more in risk protocol than they are in rehabilitation activity.

[22] These comprise the probation staff who supervise offenders i.e. probation officers or responsible officers.

Gary is thus doubly disadvantaged. Firstly, in being denied his rehabilitated identity, and secondly in looking for validation from a service which has risk management rather than rehabilitation as its principle concern.

Finally, there is Craig. Craig also communicates anger and frustration when discussing the Probation Service. As referred to earlier in this chapter, it was also one of the only times when he did not draw on humour to diffuse or distance himself from the topic in hand.

A case study: Craig's accounts of institutional power

In discussing the service's shortcomings, Craig places Probation and its staff as uncaring and greedy, "only in it for the money", and inept, "absolutely useless". He also proclaims his former probation officer to have been so bad at her job that she was sacked because of it. (Interestingly, this is a claim Jamal *also* makes about his former probation officer). However, when asked to explain exactly what is what that made probation so bad, the reasons were less forthcoming. The first reason appears in criticism levied at the infrequency of supervision sessions, "I seen my probation officer once in four months, and I'm meant to see her every week". Later, however Craig gives another reason. It is linked to his recall to prison. As he says:

> *Well, when I got recalled, I weren't meant to get recalled, 'cause I didn't actually commit a crime. I wasn't charged with anything, but they recalled me anyway.*

On being asked to elaborate on the reason for the recall, Craig instead launches into an account of having never liked Probation, charging them with being duplicitous in their guise as a helping organisation. As he complains, "they don't do anything for you, they make out they do but they don't". Indeed, this unfavourable review is then juxtaposed with the YAO service he is working with, "people like [them] are ten times better… they actually help you with what you want to do". Notably here, Craig, like Jamal and Gary before him, succumbs to the same trap of assumptions about what Probation is and does. In this instance, however, rather than a service that is incompetent due to its failure to provide a fully comprehensive rehabilitation package, in Craig's vision Probation is deficient due to its failure in operating appropriately as a helping service.

Returning to Craig's anger at Probation though, the incident of the recall is an important one. It is, as discussed previously, the crux of his wider story of the custody battle for his daughter. Indeed, he talks of having not seen her for years, and the impact it has had on him. "It's hard", he says. However, though Craig describes having reconciled the pain of being separated from his daughter, "…you get used to it", his narrative suggests that he has not reconciled his anger with the system that caused that situation to be. Linked to Craig's main narrative about his battle to be able to once again see his child, his castigation of Probation is entirely understandable. In exerting their power in recalling him for an offence of which he did not even consider to be a crime, a fight which Craig explains as "self-defence", they took away his chance to be a father.

5.6.2 They help you, they hinder you

The young men's accounts of the services and institutions that affected them were occasionally conflicted. Though they were sometimes explained as doing good, there were other times where they were said to be causing harm. A good example of this is found in Tom's experience of being sentenced to anger management as part of his suspended sentence.

A case study: Tom's experiences of mental health services

As explored earlier in this chapter, Tom's narrative centred on a lifetime of anger and violence. As described in his pen portrait (p.117), he only avoided an 18 month prison sentence due to the judge's concern of his ability to deal with the adult prison estate. In recounting the ruling he comments, "they was gonna send me down but…because I had been self-harming and everything, I wouldn't have had the support". However, as part of the order of the court, and due to the extreme violence of the act he was convicted for, Tom was instructed to undergo anger management treatment. The experience of it was summed up by the following account.

> *Er, she basically asked er, about my lifestyle, about my family, and er, she says, "why are you depressed?" I was like, "well, like me and my dad we're constantly arguing. He picks at me for little things, like he, he just gets on my nerves". And er, I says, 'I, I do it in my own time' and then she started like, carried on talking like, and*

> *she turns round and she goes, "to be honest, I think it's your dad's problem, why, why you're like this'", and basically tried to blame my dad. And I turned round to her and said, "shut up, you don't know nothing". I goes, "he's a good dad, you know, he's there for me and he, he does everything for me. Just because we have arguments you can't just blame him 'cause it's more me than him"*

Tom is in a narrative bind. Though he is grateful to the system for allowing him to avoid a potentially damaging prison term, as he says, "it's changed me knowing that, at one stage I was like, seconds away from getting sent down", he is simultaneously being forced to accept institutional discourses about himself that feel fundamentally wrong. Significantly, this is an effect which has been found in a wide range of other treatment situations too (e.g. Anderson & Sandberg, 2017; Fox, 1999; Waldram, 2007, as discussed in chapter 1). Of most frustration though, Tom's treatment is inescapable. He has no choice but to acquiesce given it is a mandatory condition of his court order to do so. His possibilities for future action are limited to what is considered permissible by the state.

The futility of Tom's relationship with court sanctioned mental health services is again highlighted in his explanations of seeking his own treatment options.

> *Um, they said we would give you tablets but if you're depressed, 'cause like I've, I tried, I almost overdosed on tablets 'cause I just took a load to try and kill myself, they says 'cause of that we can't give 'em ya'. So alright, so I've just sat here like, struggle but find my way, and just get confident in things that I haven't been able to do in the past, and work on them now and just build it up bit by bit.*

Though Tom seems willing to accept the diagnoses of the psy-disciplines (Holt, 2009; 2011) in their evaluations of him as being depressed and plagued by anger, the treatment options presented to him offer nothing that he finds helpful *or* curative. As such, he has no other option but to resort to his own will to survive.

5.6.3 The system works

As has been explored thus far, the majority of the young men described their experiences navigating the structures of society as ranging from conflicted to antagonistic. However, for one of the group, the state, with its myriad processes, procedures and systems, was placed as transformative.

A case study: Kyle and the social structures of criminal justice

Kyle talked continually of his positive experiences within all aspects of the CJS. His probation officer, “a nice… smashing lady”, was currently helping him get his case transferred, and moreover, was doing it “quick as possible”. And there was also his YAO key worker, “she’s absolutely brilliant, she is”. Kyle recounts stories of her picking him up from the hostel, mentoring him, helping with his C.V., and putting him on the housing list. He also extols the many virtues of the YAO service, “that scheme’s absolutely brilliant for ex-offenders… especially for people like me with no life experience”. Significantly, Kyle was also one of the few young men to talk favourably of school. Though there were issues (e.g. bullying, fighting and exclusions) they were also some of the “best times” of his life. Though he naturally came up against processes that were not pleasant or desired, he understood their place in a functional society. As he says of the Parole Board’s ruling for him to be assigned to a hostel, “I didn’t want to go… but I understand that’s something I need to have done”. For Kyle, processes and systems made sense. Of particular interest though, was Kyle’s praise of his experiences in prison

Starkly contrasted with his accounts of a chaotic and traumatic childhood, Kyle’s construction of prison was favourable on almost every level. As he exclaims at one point, “[it] was the best thing that ever happened to me”. Firstly, it offered him privacy and security. Though he admits to the sacrifices in terms of a loss of liberty, he “enjoy[ed]” the door being locked at night, as he was then the master of his own space. Rather than have to negotiate troublesome social situations, he was able to watch the programmes that *he* wanted to watch, whilst relaxing in his *own* bed (no doubt a reflection of his experiences of being denied such privileges growing up). Kyle also saw prison for what it was able to offer by way of both structure, “you know what you’re doing every day”, and discipline. Though fighting and misbehaviour might incur a penalty of being forced to stand up all day because, “they take your mattress off you”, it was all presented in good humour. Kyle laughs as he recounts the story. It’s just the way things are, “it’s part of life, innit”.

Prison was also found to deliver in terms of valued relationships. He talks fondly of his time there, commenting on the "banging Christmases and New Years”. He was quick to dispel stereotypes about the immorality and selfishness of prison inmates commenting, “people think it’s all bad, like its all rough… but you can meet some really nice lads”. Such positive reviews were not just reserved for his fellow prisoners though. He also spoke of the

“smashing’” staff who would send on his forms during moves between prisons so he could, “jump in with their training”. As Kyle illuminatingly comments at one point, “for some people it was heaven… it was for me”.

Of particular importance was prison’s role in helping Kyle find the benefits of physical training. Not only did it help him kick his substance misuse habit, “I would have been dead from the drugs”, it also helped him regain control of a body that had betrayed him as a child. Of note, his accounts of the “smashing” prison staff were particularly directed towards those that worked in the gym. Crewe, Warr, Bennett & Smith (2014, p.66), talk of the emotional effects of the prison gym in terms of sublimated intimacy, “in the ways that prisoners ‘spotted’ for each other, in their mutual support and encouragement”. This certainly seemed to the case with Kyle. He placed great value on the time and support he was given. Indeed, Kyle’s relationship with the gym became his life’s passion and subsequently his focus for the future. As he says, “they always say you find the one thing you enjoy, that’s mine”. Maruna (2001, p.99), in explaining the characteristics of the redemption scripts, talks about desisters “finding purpose” by helping others. As Kyle confirms, “it’s something I’d like to do myself…help other people and that”. The gym, and by extension the prison experience itself, helped Kyle find his place in life.

Prison ultimately functioned as the authoritative and nurturing parent the Kyle never had. Where his father was unreliable and absent, prison was dependable and visible. Where his mother was chaotic and permissive, prison was structured and disciplined. Instead of a life of “unsteadiness", as referenced in his symbolic wavy line in the drawing task (Figure 6, p. 108), prison offered consistency, certainty and a hopeful future. Though equally pragmatic about its darker side (Kyle also talks of friends who had self-harmed and committed suicide due to their incarceration), for Kyle prison was restitutive.

Returning once more to Fleetwood’s notion of narrative habitus (2015; 2016) Kyle’s accounts of prison are better understood. Reflecting his various narrative identities (survivor, protector, emotionally strong man), and his habitus as a young man who had survived a childhood of abuse and trauma, and emerged victorious through the regimes of the CJS, Kyle’s expectations are that he will have the strength of character to deal with whatever life throws at him. His life experiences have made him into the man he is today. As Maruna suggests of the thoughts of the desisters in his study, “because of all that I have been through, I am now this way” (2001, p.87). It is also now more understandable

as to why Kyle is not unwilling to relinquish the blame for his childhood to his mother (or to anyone, for that matter). He has survived, and he has done it through sheer strength of character. The culpability is his own to claim. From a psychosocial perspective, it might be ventured that due to his fractured, transient and traumatic childhood, combined with going to prison at such a young age (16) *and* being there for a third of his life, Kyle's unfailing admiration of the system was a product of being institutionalised. However, such a reading only takes us so far. What is of more interest is in what this glowing account of the criminal justice system might say about Kyle's intention to future action.

Kyle describes being motivated to desist for a number of reasons. For example, as prison afforded him time for his education, he now has all the qualifications needed to get a job, He even has options about the routes he might take in the future, "it's just about picking the right one for me". In addition, he has aspirations about moving to a new town and getting a new place. He is (in fact) rather sure about it, "I'll give it four months". Finally, as described earlier in this chapter, he has a new relationship in his life. A loving girlfriend who was there for him in prison when others were not. His personal motivation is unmissable. However, such personal objectives are not the only reasons for Kyle's intended desistance. It might even be argued they are the lesser motivations. He also has something of a debt to repay. But, and here eschewing the usual tropes of criminal justice discourse, the debt is not to society. In Kyle's world view, the CJS has provided. Like a loving parent who works hard to raise their child into an adult, so has prison performed that function for Kyle. Being the man that he is, someone honourable who recognises not only those who have done him wrong but those who have done him right, it is in his habitus to repay that. Out of respect for the institution that has always supported and believed in him, Kyle's desistance is not only aspirational, it is probable. Because of who Kyle is, the outcome to his story could never be otherwise (Fleetwood, 2016, p.174).

Conclusion

As this first analytic chapter has demonstrated, the young men's narratives showed great complexity and uniqueness. As discussed in chapter 4, though many explored similar experiences, the reactions to those experiences differed as the young men did. For example, stories of anger and violence were linked to past trauma for some, but to

immaturity and recklessness for others. And though all talked about the circumstances that lead to their criminality, some claimed agency for their decisions, whereas others presented more deterministic arguments.

Most notable however, was how the young men navigated narrative identity. Considerable time was expended in claiming and rejecting certain narrative positions, often as a way of articulating who they felt they were (or perhaps, how they wanted to be seen). For example, though past criminal behaviour was acknowledged by all the young men, a related criminal identity was not. Indeed, though the majority seemed unaffected by having a criminal persona, a minority fought hard to reject it. It was interesting that in such cases, criminal identities were constructed as a specific threat to moral identities. Notable too were the young men's frustrated identities, those that were desired but actively denied. This was principally linked to the institutions and systems that held the young men within them. Indeed, in seeking to claim, for example, a reformed or rehabilitated status, the young men were reliant on powerful others to validate them. Where this did not happen, frustration and anger quickly followed. Moreover, for some, being 'awarded' a rehabilitated identity meant being forced to acquiesce to uncomfortable, unfamiliar and unfavourable institutional narratives, something which did much to marginalise and alienate the young men.

Of particular interest was how themes of desistance were explored. Of the 8 who directly expressed interest in pursuing crime-free futures, their reasons for doing so were notably disparate. For some, desistance was a way of reclaiming an essential goodness, demonstrating who they *really* were all along. For others the reasons were practical - criminality being constructed as unsustainable and inefficient. There were also motivations due to personal loss, some choosing desistance pathways due to the restrictions a criminal status presented in spending time with loved ones. There were even developmental arguments, those who no longer saw a fit between childlike criminality and adult responsibility. And in the case of one, desistance was embedded within a strict moral code. Pursuing a crime-free future was constructed as being the right and decent thing to do.

Most importantly however, (particularly to the narrative criminology tradition), was how the young men indicated future action through their narratives. This was demonstrated in a range of ways. Firstly, in the role that context played. Indeed, within the prison

environment, the young men suggested a willingness to act in certain (violent) ways if the situation demanded it. This was even for those who directly placed violence outside of their natural character. Future action was also suggested through the young men's plans to leave criminogenic friendships, understood as they were as barriers to desistance. Interestingly, being *unable* to leave criminogenic friendships was also relevant to future action, with continued criminality being heavily implied as a result of it. Finally, intended future action was evident through insights into the young men's habitus. Even when desistance was the goal, (criminal) action was still suggested to be likely if the situation demanded certain, socially sanctioned responses.

This chapter has explored both the main themes of the young men's narratives, *and* the stylistic techniques used to embed meaning. It has also considered how the social world may have imprinted itself upon the young men's understandings, in terms of the key discourses drawn on to explain and make sense of their lives. However, the impact of the social in terms of the role of the interview situation and of the researcher has not been explored. This is expressly important when it comes to better understanding the young men's investments in telling certain narratives in certain ways. Chapter 6 therefore, now addresses this important matter.

Chapter 6: Reflexivity, power and the social context of the interview

Chapter 5 explored the core themes drawn on by the young men in explaining and making sense of their lives. Though it considered the impact of the social world in terms of the particular discourses drawn on (and the possible reasons for that), consideration has not yet been given to the role of the social in the immediate *production* of those narratives. This second analysis chapter addresses this important matter.

In taking a reflexive stance, this chapter explores the young men's narratives as a function and consequence of the social world in which they were produced. The topics explored in this chapter include the argument for a reflexive perspective; the role of the interview setting in establishing power; power dynamics in the drawing task; the challenges of digitally recording interviews with offenders; investments in preserving 'good' selves; and the presence of masculinities in the interview context. The chapter then moves on to re-visit the field notes of a particular interviewee, considering them through an intersectional lens. To finish, a brief consideration is given to counter-arguments when it comes to taking a reflexive position.

6.1 The need for reflexivity in considering the interview process

The importance of a reflexive approach is very much tied up with its own definition i.e. that the researcher acknowledges and responds to their own presence within the research. Indeed, reflexivity recognises the explicit involvement of the researcher (Bourdieu, 1990; Medico & Santiago-Delefosse, 2014; Probst, 2015). Specifically, their continuous, dynamic and subjective self-awareness in the research process (Finlay, 2002). Berger (2013) talks of reflexivity in terms of turning the lens back on one's self, bringing one's own positionality in to focus. The researcher takes responsibility for their own situatedness within the research. This might be in the effect that the researcher has on the object of study *or* the decisions made about the management of data i.e. how it is collected, what is collected and how it is interpreted. From this view, the products of research are understood as always affected by the conditions in which they are sought.

Converse to the ideas of Husserl (1970) when it comes to a phenomenological approach to inquiry, reflexivity challenges the notion of knowledge production as independent, both of the researcher producing it, *and* of the objectivity of the knowledge itself. This understanding is essential when conducting research that seeks to make sense of people's lived experiences. In examining our own world-view, we exercise caution in drawing conclusions about the lives of others. Indeed, without casting a reflective gaze, data can be easily decontextualised, manipulated and distorted.

Presser (2005) highlights the essentialness of a reflexivity which looks at the context of the interview and the resources that allow it to take place. The researcher is a collaborator in the production of the narrative. Thus, how the researcher is perceived, even how the researcher might have communicated the very purpose of the interview, will likely affect how the narrator selects the "facts" about "what happened" (Presser, 2005, p.2069). As she suggests,

> *As instigator and director of the interview—with any subjects—the researcher sets the agendum, even if it is one of apparently unstructured talk.*
>
> (ibid)

In my own research, there were a multiplicity of factors which may have impacted on what stories the young men told, how they told them *and* how they engaged with the interview process as a whole. This chapter explores these matters.

6.2 The interview setting and its role in establishing authority

Where an interview is conducted can be highly shaping, both in terms of what data is produced *and* the ways in which it might affect the research relationship. Herzog (2005, p. 25) argues that the location of an interview plays a significant role in constructing reality. It simultaneously serves as both a "cultural product and producer", and should therefore be examined within the social context of the study *and* as an integral part of the interpretation of the findings. Interviews with offenders can be even more laden with power issues. As Presser (2005) reminds us,

> *…when offenders tell us why they offended, they are not just voicing an internal attitude about their prerogatives. They are also responding to those circumstances that allow us to ask why.*
>
> (Presser, 2005, p.2070)

For my own research, all interviews were conducted in a third-party location. The London interviews took place at a café where the young men worked as part of their mentoring programme with their YAO organisation. For the Worcester and Shropshire participants, the interviews were in a private room in one of the YAO service offices. The choice of these locations was bounded by a) the ease of where we could mutually meet and b) meeting the conditions of the University Ethics Committee with regard to participant and researcher safety. However, these locations brought with them two particular challenges. Firstly, it did much to place me as 'one of them' (i.e. key-worker/probation officer). I was there in a professional capacity. I was introduced by other professionals, who in many ways looked and behaved like me. And for the Shropshire and Worcestershire interviews, I also carried with me the symbols of authority i.e. the identity badge, keys (to locked rooms), and in the Shropshire YAO office, a panic alarm, to 'ensure my safety'. For the young men taking part in my research, it must have been pretty hard to distinguish me from the formal surroundings. Secondly, these locations very directly positioned the young men as 'offenders'. They were literally occupying those spaces *because* of that status. Not only then was I interviewing them due to their involvement with the CJS, I was doing so in a location which viewed and dealt with them exclusively as 'law breakers'[23]. As such, it seems likely that their narrative choices were ones common to those locations i.e. their criminal history and/or their pathways into and out of crime.

The impact of location certainly seemed the case with Scott. Indeed, as explored in chapter 5, Scott presented himself as 'offender' right from the start, drawing specific attention to his status as a prolific and priority offender (PPO). He laid all the 'bad' right away, possibly in a belief of what was expected of him as the subject of my research. Though I made effort to show interest in other stories he told, Scott always returned to his offender identity. However, it is also possible that Scott enjoyed this identity. Indeed, at one stage I asked him to briefly outline the crime for which he was sent to prison for. Rather than tell me himself, he suggested I look him up on the internet. Though this course of action might have been in accordance with my implied official status, with Scott

[23] As opposed to a home environment where they might be a son/boyfriend, or in an educational environment where they would be considered a student.

considering I somehow had authority over his personal history, it is also possible is that he wanted to impress.

My interpreted role as criminal justice authority figure also presented through my interview with Gary. However, with Gary the effect of my implied official status was one of suspicion and resistance. Gary was openly mistrustful of the whole interview situation. This was notable in his response to the room in which the interview was being held and the equipment and research materials I was using to document it. He took a detailed look around the room as he entered, particularly at the corners, and made a theatrical show of checking below the table where I was sitting. Throughout the interview his eyes continually darted around, and he turned his head often to keep check on what I can only assume was some potential hidden threat, CCTV maybe? In terms of information shared, Gary was defensive at all times. Though his storytelling was forthcoming and often rich in detail he made a point to omit all names, places and specifics that might, I assume, incriminate him or those around him. In one instance, he gave a rather exaggerated refusal to disclose the details of a friend after I inquired as to who they were. The question, *'What's his name?'*, was merely polite and conversational on my part yet flagged up seemingly dangerous ground to him. One of the topics on which Gary was particularly closed on was his reason for receiving a prison term. Again, he made a theatre of his secrecy, stating it was something he did not wish to disclose and would ultimately prefer not to talk about. However, given that he later revealed the crime and his subsequent involvement with the police in great detail, the proclamation felt more about keeping me in check rather than a genuine desire to stay away from the subject. I concur with Presser (2005, p.2086) here when she contends "the female interviewer of male informants, who wields discursive power and whose research is permitted if not authorized by the state, is seen to be stepping out of place". It is possible that Gary's need for control (only disclosing stories on his own terms), combined with an interest in keeping me in my place, was a greater issue for him than the protection of potentially incriminating information.

Reflecting on all aspects of our meeting, not just the recorded interview, it felt pretty clear that Gary saw me as an extension of the CJS. Though I made great effort to underline my separateness from it, my subsequent impartiality, *and* to talk about the research as my personal project, Gary remained resolute to my apparent official status. At one stage I thought I had made something of a breakthrough as he began to draw on the educational terminology I was very consciously sewing in to the interview, using phrases such as "your

university project", or "getting a good mark". However, a mobile phone call towards the end of the interview suggested otherwise. As he apologised for the interruption and I invited him to take the call in case it was important, he informed the caller that he would be free later that afternoon after he had "finished with Probation". As we were neither in a probation office, nor did he have an appointment with a key worker after our interview, the implied criminal justice authority figure was obviously me. It is possible that the formal situation of the seated, recorded interview might well have drawn strong and negative associations for Gary with his past experiences with the police and the legal system. Such factors may explain much of his reluctance to freely disclose, and his general wariness of the whole research process.

Gary, however, was not alone in his translation of my role as researcher to one of official other. A number of the young men acted similarly, and this subsequently played out in their interactions with me. Notably, I was also placed as counsellor/therapist. This was hugely apparent in the interviews I conducted with Ben and Tom.

Ben's life, as he described it, was punctuated by tragedy and loss and these were subjects he accessed most readily. He appeared more comfortable with recounting narratives of emotional trauma and physical pain than anything else. Within 20 minutes of the interview starting he had spoken of his self-harming behaviour and attempts to take his own life, and the death of three others close to him through the most extreme of ways - suicide, tragic accident and murder. So dramatic was his storytelling that I found myself wondering if these particular stories were being drawn forth as a means with which to shock, and therefore retain interest. It is also possible though that Ben's stories of hardship were the result of his perception of the role I was to fulfil for him. The more intimate structure of the biographical narrative approach seemed to engender a counsellor/client like relationship - the emotional intensity in his narrative creating between us a substitutionary "therapeutic space" (Garfield, Reavey & Kotecha, 2010; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). At times it felt like I was less there to address *my* research agenda and more to meet *his* need to tell a particular story to a sympathetic ear.

Noticeable too though, was my role in all this. As much as I was being placed as caring professional, I was commensurately supporting this illusion myself (albeit not intentionally). This issue is best exemplified in my interview with Tom. As with Ben, Tom's depiction of his personal history was most obviously situated in the difficult and distressing. He drew

frequently on emotive topics (e.g. his experience of being bullied at school; his self-harming behaviour and suicide attempts; having a father with cancer), and appeared happy to dissect them all through detailed self-analysis. For example, he described several traumatic incidents including close people in his life having and dying of cancer, being a victim of multiple unprovoked violent attacks, and experiencing accidents and incidents that on two occasions nearly resulted in his death. Whether these events were all grounded in a truthful reality as Tom saw it seems not to be the issue. It felt more that this presentation of self was a reflection of how he saw (or chose to see) me and relatedly, what my imagined role of counsellor might offer him.

So what of my part in all this? How did I uphold this illusion? Arguably, it was in how I drew on certain language, specifically my use of therapeutic phrases, e.g. “that must have been really hard for you” and “I’m sorry that happened to you”. I also treated his disclosures with great sensitivity, deliberately seeking to show my understanding and compassion. My then ten years conducting research with vulnerable young people undoubtedly affected how I responded to Tom. Due to my beliefs at that time concerning young people with ‘chaotic and difficult’ backgrounds, I continually found understanding in his criminality and at times reasons to excuse it. Despite the severity of his crime, Tom revealed he had not received a prison term explaining that his mental health had been a significant mitigating factor. It struck me that this information, compounded with my own brief history of working with young people with mental health issues, had gone a long way in my subconscious allowances for his criminal behaviour. The gruesomeness of Tom’s crime and his constant discourse of fighting and violence appeared (to me) incongruous with his gentle mannerisms and obliging nature. I reconciled this by responding to his disclosures empathetically. The impact of all this may have gone some way towards encouraging Tom to produce narratives that cast him as ‘Hero’, ‘Revenger’ and ‘tragic victim’ (as explored in chapter 5).

The suggestion that our meeting was soon to end seemed to prompt a rather urgent need for Tom to further disclose. In the 15 minutes that followed, he described another traumatic experience with the stillbirth of his first child, and the subsequent parenting course he was attending at a local college so as to learn how to be a become a better parent in future. The client/therapist dynamic again emerged as Tom started to list details about the tragedy and the impact it had had on him and his then partner. As we talked, I became very aware of how close we were circling counselling territory. I could sense my language was starting

to cross the line from qualitative enquiry, “What happened next? Can you tell me more about that?”, to humanistic counselling, “How did that make you feel?”, “How would you like things to be?” - a result of having spent time in counselling myself and having a parent also trained as a counsellor. The impact of this I felt was demonstrable in Tom’s subsequent comment that he had seen three “other” counsellors but they had felt too confrontational to him. The implication of the word was a weighty indicator as to how he perhaps come to perceive me and our relationship. The return of Tom’s key worker signalled a forced end to our encounter and I found myself, as with previous interviews, caught between drawing a respectful close and wanting to offer support/empathy for what he had gone through. The presence of the key worker did little to break Tom’s commitment to the subject however, and he persisted with sharing more and more details as we followed her up the corridor until the physicalness of their exit out the front door ended our communication. The weight of Tom’s need/want to tell me this story felt immense, and as with Ben before him, the responsibility of my listening therefore essential, especially given the emotional investment he had made in trusting me with it.

6.3 The drawing task

My assumed position as authoritative other unfortunately worked in other ways to create challenges in the research process. In particular, it made it much harder to generate a collaborative atmosphere. The drawing task was problematic in this regard. As noted in chapter 3, visual methods have been lauded for their empowering potential (Godden, 2017; Lewis, 2016; Liebenberg, 2009; Vindrola-Padros, Martins, Coyne, Bryan & Gibson, 2016). They can be mechanisms to aid conversations (Galman, 2009), as well as useful artefacts for analysis (Clark, 2004). Though, as Schulze (2017) notes, the use of visual research methods can go a long way towards reducing the power imbalances in the research relationship, they can also throw up power issues too. I was to find this in my own research.

Though I realised the drawing task would be shaping in terms of the narratives produced, I had not anticipated how uniquely the young men would respond to it. There was in fact little commonality in how each navigated the task. For some, it was treated with great interest and worked effectively to involve them in the interviews. Jamal, for example, found

it hugely enjoyable. He was the only one to engage without questioning what it was about, and very quickly made it his own. He took great pride in his work, spending over 15 minutes drawing up his first picture, and unlike the others who waited for me to refer to their drawings in order to facilitate a structure to the interview, Jamal very much set the agenda. Later, as we exhausted the stories from his timeline chart, I asked him to draw something again. This time, I requested he draw the people in his life. Once again Jamal used this as an opportunity to put his own stamp on things, adding further dimensions to the characterisations of his friends and family such as, 'importance', 'time-spent with', and 'relevance to him before and after prison'. Though I was facilitating the task, Jamal was clearly its driver. For others however, the task presented discomfort. Craig for example, appeared rather unsure about it. It took some encouragement from me to get him to draw anything, and when he did it comprised a picture of around 1cm squared. Given the paper was A3 sized, it seemed to make a point, likely about Craig's unease with the process.

Galman (2009) makes an important observation on the topic of requesting individuals to draw as part of the interview experience. She states:

> *Getting adults to draw – a task many deem child-like – opens those individuals up to feelings of similarly child-like vulnerability: this side effect should be treated with care but not without value.*
>
> (Galman, 2009, p.203)

Galman suggests vulnerability may be an issue when asking research participants to take what might be seen as an emotional 'risk' in expressing themselves artistically (ibid). To counter this, she describes attempting to build rapport with her participants, and providing ample "work time" so that participants might feel more comfortable in what they are doing. However, though attempting to build rapport and allowing time was something I did with Craig, (and all the young men), it did not seem to remove the barriers to possible anxiety about the task. As such, the drawing was left very much to the side of our discussions.

Kyle too seemed uncomfortable with my request. Unlike Craig though, Kyle articulated his mistrust directly, informing me he was aware of its psychological-test like properties. Though I tried to convince him otherwise, I sensed he did not believe me. Of note, this accusation of psychologising was something that had come up in the pilot interviews too. It is also possible that such methods worked even more to position me as some form of professional other, perhaps in this instance even psychiatrist.

With two of the young men, Darnel and Gary, the drawing task brought about complete resistance. For Darnel, I was not sure whether this was because he didn't like the pressure of having to draw *or* that I had asked him to do so, but he was clearly not up for it. It took me several attempts to get him to pick up the pen, and even then I had to draw something first before he would engage with the task. I ended up sketching out a simple timeline to enable him to document key events in his life. He lodged his objections by commenting what a "very weird thing" it was to ask someone to do. Looking back now, it is likely this course of action compromised the early part of the interview. My choice of a timeline resulted in Darnel only documenting a few events, and all to do with his criminal past. In turn, the first half of the interview became an almost exclusive account of his crimes and the subsequent reasons for his imprisonment. Whether this was reflective of how he actually saw himself or whether he thought that was what was expected of him (i.e. to respond to my questions solely in his capacity as offender) was unclear. This resistance to the drawing task proved to be a consistent feature of the interview. When I asked him to again engage in the drawing task by requesting he write/sketch out the people in his life, Darnel ignored the request and the pen which I was offering him, instead choosing to talk directly on the subject. Whilst I didn't get the sense that he was unwilling to participate in the research, it was clear that the drawing task was out. As Nunkoosing (2005, p.701) notes of such dynamics during the interview process, "there are moments when choice is limited. However… resistance is always a possibility".

Finally, there was Gary. He was the only one of the 10 interviewees to categorically refuse to engage with the drawing task. Though Darnel bypassed my request to draw a second picture, he did oblige in the first. Gary, however, delivered a resounding "no". I did not feel that this blanket refusal was because of anxiety about the requirements of the task, nor any confusion about what its purpose was. He was explicit in his communication that if I wanted to know about his life I could ask him. Reflecting Galman's assertions that such tasks may be seen as "child-like" (2009, p.203), Gary's resistance is particularly understandable. Engaging in a child-like drawing activity did not fit as his habitus as a young man who had fully matured, left his youthful criminality behind him, and as such had successfully transitioned to adulthood. As such, his refusal was an inevitable course of action.

Galman's (2009) thinking around such matters is again useful here. In her own research, she described not cajoling or otherwise coercing participation, and leaving those who changed their mind or opted not to participate at any stage in data collection to do so without question. As she argues,

> *One must be sensitive to the unavoidable power imbalance existing between researchers and study participants in such a context*
>
> (Galman, 2009, p.203).

Though I encouraged the young men to take part and persevered where they seemed unsure (reassuring them of its use purely as a navigational tool), in line with Galman's (2009) advice, I was careful not to push them into doing the task. Not only is such coercion entirely unethical, it also would have sat at complete odds with my desire for an empowering research experience. However, given the position I occupied as researcher, their placement as offender, and a number of other key identity characteristics which offered me further positions of power (discussed later in this chapter), the drawing task proved a controversial choice of research method.

6.4 Recording the interview: The technology elephant in the room

The next sequential challenge concerned the presence of the digital recorder. Sandberg & Copes (2012, p.186) discuss this matter in a paper exploring the challenges of conducting research with drug dealers and other offenders. In interviews with 15 ethnographers studying drug dealers, the authors found a mixed response to their value, some feeling it interrupted rapport and created an overly formal setting. The authors also drew on the research of Jacobs (1999) and Williams (1989), in their contentions that drug dealers may link recording devices with undercover police. This point of view seemed entirely possible with Gary.

As a point of professional transparency with *all* face-to-face interviews, I deliberately leave the digital recorder in plain sight so everything is (quite literally) on the table from the start. I also inform participants in writing that I intend to record the interview using that method, and remind them again when an interview date is being arranged. Gary, however, reacted

with evident surprise upon seeing it[24]. It was clear he had a limited understanding of who I was, what the interview was about, and definitely the manner in which I hoped to document it. Despite me providing a full explanation at the beginning, Gary proceeded to question me very directly about why I needed to record the interview and what I intended to do with the data. However, although openly wary of the presence of the recorder, I noted that Gary was not intimidated or made self-conscious by it. His suspicions had their foundations in whether it was already on (i.e. whether I had been secretly recording him) and relatedly, if the interview was genuinely confidential. He then, and continually thereafter, sought assurance that I was not going to disclose details of the interview to his probation officer. This was a point of some importance to Gary and he often returned to it to reestablish boundaries and to stress that I was to keep all information to myself. He was particularly concerned that I might share details of the interview with his key worker at the YAO organisation, stating "I'll sue ya if I find out you've told anyone". However, though these initial concerns did not stop Gary from talking — he still spoke strongly about his negative views of the CJS and the professionals within them — it is probable that he saw need to make certain decisions about 'safe' topics. The unexpected presence of the digital recorder seemingly narrowed Gary's scope of possible narratives, and moreover conditioned his telling of them. His warning that he might sue me, seemed to underline Gary's need to broker some kind of insurance against the potential threat of exposure.

For others, the digital recorder was less of a security threat and more a symbol of pressure. Its presence demanded something of the young men. This was the case with Craig. In many ways, Craig was extremely challenging to interview. Whilst he was not reluctant to talk, he was not prone to giving detailed stories and there was no spontaneous recounting of new or related stories - two practices that are characteristic of biographical narrative methods (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; Wengraf, 2001). Instead, he tended to engage in talk only in response to direct questioning and rarely elaborated on his points, routinely leaving answers undeveloped or hanging mid-air. On several occasions I found myself reaching for things to say to keep the momentum going. This lack of detail and unwillingness/inability (I'm not sure which, if either) to introduce new areas of discussion also meant that I began leading the interview. Notably though, when the tape was turned off Craig became demonstrably more forthcoming. Prompted at first by my joke of feeling like a primary school teacher (with all the coloured pens and drawing equipment I was

[24] Gary's response suggested his selection for participation might have been something rather last minute on the part of the YAO agency.

carrying with me), Craig picked up again on his negative experiences of school, and his perception of it all being a 'massive misfit'. The absence of the tape appeared to provoke a wealth of new stories. He talked of being uncomfortable in the physical space of a classroom, with its associated expectations of academic learning and success, and contrasted it with the practical spaces of the prison educational facilities (workshops, electrical studios etc.), a positive environment seen to be removed of pressure. As Arvay (2008, p.166) comments "self-disclosure concerning the personal experiences of the researcher often initiates authentic dialogue". Though I would question Arvay's terminology of "authentic dialogue", all talk is the product of a social experience, and is thus neither truly authentic nor inauthentic, talking about my own experience certainly prompted further exposition from Craig.

The turning off of the digital recorder combined with me beginning to contribute stories of my own, seemed to subconsciously signal to Craig the conclusion of his role as 'subject' and mine as 'detective'. For Craig, the familiar and less demanding structure of the traditional conversation may have encouraged a more spontaneous exposition, in addition to the possibly welcome shift from him as the point of enquiry. I thought at the time that Craig's reticence to provide detailed life narratives was perhaps due to the unfamiliarity of the situation and an anxiety about what was expected of him. Though this might well be the case, it also possible that not being recorded, and therefore having no 'evidence' to be held accountable to, freed Craig up to speak in ways that the taped interview had denied.

However, it was not simply the mechanics of the interview (the location, the research materials and the technology) that affected the young men's narratives. Notable too was how we each of them played out their particular identities to me, and how I in turn played out mine to them. The remainder of this chapter then, explores issues of masculinities, gender politics, class and race/ethnicity in considering the narrative directions of these young men.

6.5 Seeking a positive view: The investment in being a 'good guy'

For a number of the young men, my age and gender seemed to have the effect of producing narratives of respectability. Though I am not suggesting this wasn't how and

who they were, it struck me that they wanted to promote this part of themselves to me. For example, there seemed to be an investment for some in promoting a 'good guy' persona (something also noted in the thematic account of the interviews in chapter 5). Whether this was to circumvent some imagined preconceived impression I might have of them or because it was just in their personalities to be that way, I wasn't sure. However, I got the definite sense that several wanted to be seen positively.

In Keenan and Ben's interviews, they both went out of their way to be obliging and at times, oddly deferential. At several points, they drew on terminology that felt more reflective of who I was rather than who they were. For example, both chose to use the professional term "young people" to describe their own demographic group. Whilst this is a commonly used term in media, governmental literature, education, and social and health services, it is not one typically used by this age-group to describe themselves. The term itself has a very *othering* quality, and felt strange coming from two within that group. Keenan later went on to use the even more specific term, "young adult". This term is highly institutional and made me consider how much influence the YAO service, and more broadly the criminal justice system, had had on Keenan. I was careful to not overuse the term in my recruitment literature[25], so it really stood out as a buzz-word. Moreover, in Ben's interview, he twice apologised for swearing in front of me. This marked me once again as some 'authoritative other', but also had a rather outdated gendering to it - the taboo of *swearing in front of an older woman*. The gesture itself, though thoughtful in one sense, seemed principally born out of Ben's interest in me seeing him as well mannered.

Significantly, for some this need to be seen as good was directly challenged by their status and stories as offenders. Similar to the findings of Holt (2010) where parents were required to manage "spoiled identities" due to being issued a Parenting Order, so too was their conflict in the narratives of the young men in this research. In the telling of their stories of wrong-doing, they struggled in concurrently preserving their good guy identities. This was definitely the case with Jon and Jamal.

Jon was charming, insightful and eloquent. He easily took to the unstructured nature of the interview, understanding quickly what I wanted from him in terms of story-telling. He shared details about his life openly, providing self-reflection and points for further

[25] Indeed, it was only used in the title to my research document - see appendices

discussion. He was skilled at reading and responding to the techniques I used in the interview, for example understanding that a puzzled face meant need for further explanation. He would also occasionally use humour and rhetoric to punctuate his stories. I noted how swiftly he read my positive response to this and found more ways in which to incorporate it in to his expositions. Significantly, this was something I congratulated him for on many times throughout the interview. However, though this was in many ways ideal for me as an interviewer, it meant for Jon that he ended up labouring through the narratives where he was having to present himself negatively. Of note, this was particularly in the story of slapping his younger sister. He carried obvious shame in the incident, and visibly struggled through its retelling. However, though shame was locked hard into this memory as it was, it is plausible that recounting it was even more difficult sitting in front of me. Not only did I represent 'professional adult', one who might well judge such behaviour as morally wrong, I was also a woman. It is possible that Jon considered this disclosure might make him appear additionally threatening to me.

This cognitive dissonance was equally observable with Jamal. Throughout his interview, he seemed to have difficulty in placing himself as the bad guy in his own stories. When he was forced to do so (in discussing his criminal past) this sat awkwardly, and he worked hard to detach himself from it all. To counter against what I felt was some perceived threat of judgment from me, Jamal quickly positioned himself as fully reformed and morally redeemed (as discussed in chapter 5). He made a point right from the start to take ownership for his criminal past and appealed to me on a level of 'someone who now knows'. This was highly apparent in how he chose to direct the first 10 minutes of the interview. Indeed, of the first 1,978 words of our interview, just 50 words were mine, and these were mainly clarifying his points rather than asking my own questions. Though this was his prerogative to do so, and it was obviously great for me in terms of data, there was a sense this immediate narrative of redemption was there for a purpose. Following Maruna's contentions that desisting offenders have much to explain (2001, p.85), it is possible I functioned for Jamal as another "authority" (ibid) that need to be convinced of his logic, believability and respectability (p.86).

Jamal's need for approval/acceptance also seemed to play out in his particular narrative choices. For example, when talking about his family background at the opening of the interview, he touched on his sister's occupation. Though at first he identified her as a teacher, he later changed her "good job" status to lecturer. Though he may have

unintentionally conflated teacher and lecturer to be the same thing (I myself do this *as* a lecturer), it is also possible there were class issues at play there. Jamal, in closing the perceived gap between us, chose lecturer over teacher as he considered the latter to sound more impressive. Especially to a me, a university student.

6.6 Exploring masculinities

As explored in chapter 5, the performance of masculinity was prevalent throughout most of the young men's narratives. However, what specific impact might a female researcher have in these particular narratives?

Pini (2005) discusses such matters in a paper exploring her experiences as a young, female doctoral student interviewing male leaders in an Australian agricultural organisation. She describes the ways masculinities were performed through the men emphasising their heterosexuality, presenting themselves as powerful and busy, and positioning themselves as having expert and superior knowledge. Pini notes how hegemonic masculinities became visible when the men were seen to be being challenged (Pini, 2005, p.212). Though in my study I was older than my interviewees, there was a definite sense with some that my role as professional researcher was seen as a challenge to their personal power. Hegemonic masculinities subsequently emerged through very male narratives e.g. the hardships of being 'inside', histories of fighting and violence, and as explored later in this chapter, disciplined physical training.

Presser (2005) too talks of the many ways in which masculinities are performed when women interview male offenders. In her research exploring the narratives of violent men, she observes how their accounts of violence were situated in particular power relations. For example, she describes being positioned in certain ways (e.g. 'heterosexual female' and 'object of fantasy') in order to facilitate the men's presentation of themselves as "good and manly" (Presser, 2005, p.2086), and that she became subject to mild coercion and threats. These behaviours, she argues, underlined a disinterest in women occupying powerful roles - such as that of researcher. So then, how did masculinities and gender politics impact on the co-production of the data described in this research?

6.6.1 Masculinity and the navigation of shared space

In a paper exploring the issues in conducting research with men, Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2001) characterise the interview as an arena in which masculinity is both displayed and is under threat. As will be explored, this certainly felt the case with a number of the young men in this study.

Masculinity was communicated in a range of ways throughout the interviews. One of the more interesting was in how the young men navigated our shared space. Jamal and Darnel, for example, operated in the physical environment in ways that felt friendly and unthreatening. However, this conviviality was commensurate with what also felt an interest in remapping power differentials. Jamal in particular seemed to function in a way that sought to place us as equals, rather than any other lesser power dynamic. He would often lean far over the table towards me when he was speaking, and had a habit of arranging and rearranging the research materials on the table in front of us (the drawing pad, pens and digital recorder). On two occasions he actually did after this *after* I had arranged it in another particular manner. He was also prone to punctuating his story-telling with large, exaggerated gestures, and was seemingly unconcerned with how he might come across to me *or* self-conscious of the attention it was drawing from others. Though there was undeniably an absent-mindedness to some of Jamal's mannerisms, the way in which he engaged with our shared environment seemed to exude masculine energy.

This friendly, yet masculine negotiation of space was apparent too in my interview with Darnel. Though he was considerably less confident than Jamal in his general demeanour, he too saw ways to change the space between us to make it more comfortable for him (and with seemingly little interest in how it affected me). For example, at one point the sun was getting in his eyes due to the time of day and where we were sitting. In dealing with this, Darnel opted to move round the table to sit directly next to me (as opposed to sitting across the table from me as he had been before). Physically he was a big guy and accordingly took up a lot of room. I was subsequently required to become smaller and move up against the wall to make room for him. The action was interesting in terms of asserting a masculine confidence, but also engaging us in a physical proximity that would have perhaps have been unlikely had I been a man.

The use of space and its communication of masculinity was even more apparent when it came to Kyle and Gary. Both of these young men seemed to co-opt our shared environment as a means to assert control. Kyle's masculine dominance was apparent from the outset. As he entered the room he chose the chair adjacent to mine but instead of sitting *at* the table, legs underneath as I was doing, he turned his chair outwards and opted for a crossed arms and outstretched crossed legs position. This action resulted in me then having to move so I could make eye-contact with him *and* meant that I had to reposition the drawing task materials so that he could still reach them. There was almost certainly a level of defiance in the gesture, but I think something of a defensiveness in it too. Kyle appeared to want to communicate his indifference to me and the unusualness of research situation, but I also felt it was to make clear I was to keep my distance. Interestingly, this arrogation of our shared space was also apparent in how he used the objects within it. For example, the mug of coffee he brought into the interview with him became something of a character in our interactions. He would often take a very audible sip to indicate the end of a point or to interrupt a line of questioning. At other times he would put the cup down heavily to produce the same effect. Whilst I am aware my personal beliefs about social conduct weigh in significantly here – politeness, in this instance, being indicated by paying full attention to the other person and being mindful about 'noise-making' – I still felt that this course of action was in some way tactical in order to establish control over the situation. Of note, Kyle revealed later in the interview that he had only been out of prison for three weeks after having been inside for six years. I wondered whether this factor may have contributed to his need to assert himself against my supposed role of authority figure, and psychologically speaking, *defend* his own space. Drawing on Fleetwood's (2015; 2016) ideas once again, it is possible that given a third of Kyle's life had been spent in prison, a hyper masculine environment, that it was within his habitus to act in such ways.

However, where Kyle's navigation of our shared space was at times uncomfortable, Gary's was unnerving. Personality wise, Gary was a tightly-coiled spring. He was aggressive, confrontational and occasionally threatening. Unlike the composed and controlled demeanour of Kyle, Gary was unpredictable. He used his physicality to dominate the room, and often took to his feet when making a point as if the words themselves were not enough to convey the feelings behind them. The visceral passion with which he spoke about certain elements of his life was clearly translated through his use of truculent hand gestures (e.g. pointing, drumming on the table with his finger tips and clenching his fists) and a deliberate manipulation of the volume and pace of his speech (e.g. raising the level

of his voice from conversational to shouting, or speaking in lengthy monologues that quickened in pace to apparently underline the urgency of his points). Gary's very masculine energy permeated every inch of the space between us.

6.6.2 Heteronormativity and the performance of gender roles

Masculinity presented too in the young men's choice of topics. One of which, as has been explored briefly in chapter 5, comprised their stories of health, fitness and physical training. However, it was not just the gym narratives themselves that were interesting, it was also in how they felt tailored for me. In particular, it was noticeable how they communicated these stories through the centring of their own bodies. Kyle, for example, talked at great length about becoming a personal trainer. As explored previously, this was something that felt intrinsically linked to his self-image. However, his interest in this profession was most commonly explained in terms of what it had done for him. He talked on several occasions of being an "overweight kid", and how he had changed himself completely through eating well and disciplined weight training. He frequently gestured to his own body when explaining these changes, and spoke of his pride in how he now looked. The constant turning of the research lens to his physical self really stood out to me.

This interest in directing *my* attention to *their* body was even more pronounced in Gary. Gary had a defined frame and was clearly proud of it. Though he demonstrated this in his style, wearing clothing that showed off his physique, it was most notable in his behaviour. On one occasion he made a show of flexing his biceps in a peacock like display of masculinity and prowess, announcing "look at those muscles". He then moved to direct my gaze to the evidence of his physical change.

> *Gary: You get like stretch marks, I don't know if you can see 'em, can you see them?*
>
> *KD: Um, vaguely.*
>
> *Gary: Can you see 'em, there?*
>
> *KD: Oh a little bit yeah. Yeah I guess if you're building up…*
>
> *Gary: I got stretch marks here, you get them on your legs 'cause I got big legs, you get them on your back as well, and on the sides of your chest. They're starting to fade now, 'cause look they're all white. They're not all pink.*

Though all this posturing did not feel consciously flirtatious, given the implied formality of the research situation and the fact we were meeting under professional rather than social circumstances, it was oddly overfamiliar. I also sensed that Gary was assuming my heterosexuality, and was concluding that such a display of strength and power would also be welcomed by me. As with Darnel before, I felt certain that had I been a man he would never have behaved in such a way. Indeed, Gary often seemed to wrestle in his response to me on one level as authority figure and another as a woman.

This gendered interaction was also observable in my interviews with Jamal and Darnel. Though very different young men, both frequently found ways to change the dynamic between us such that it was they and not I who was in control. Jamal, for example, projected confidence. At the first moment of our meeting, he walked ahead of his key worker as he made his way over to where I was sat in the café. He extended a hand and explained who he was before the key worker had chance to. He then proceeded to conduct something of a mini-interview with me, asking questions about what the research comprised and what I would be doing with the data afterwards. As explored with Jamal earlier, I sensed he wanted me to see him as self-possessed and in control. This was made even more clear later in the interview. At one point whilst exploring his alcoholism and its impact on his criminal activity, Jamal started questioning me about my own relationship with alcohol, “Did I drink? How often? Was it socially?”. I answered his questions briefly to keep the friendly momentum, and to try and mitigate against the obvious power imbalance of affording him only the role of ‘subject’, but it struck me how self-assured he was in feeling able to change what was in reality a clear, albeit unspoken, order of proceedings.

This turning of the tables was also felt with Darnel. However where there was ambiguity in how Jamal responded to my identity as a woman, there was certainty with Darnel. After our interview had finished he took up the researcher role himself and began questioning me on various topics, most notably what I was wearing. He asked me first about the print on my dress, and then whether I had deliberately colour coordinated my belt and shoes. Not only was this a highly gendered choice of topic (the implied association of ‘women like talking about clothes’), it also felt uncomfortably intimate. My body was now apparently up for discussion. Soyer (2013, p.461) notes that female researchers often find that their bodies are on display when they conduct fieldwork in male-dominated settings. They

become the subjects of research who are observed, labeled, and analysed by the participants (Pante, 2014). I noted how it quickly this change established a new power dynamic between us. More pertinently, I noted it was one that Darnel seemed altogether more happy with.

As with Gary, I felt the way Jamal and Darnel acted towards me was highly reflective of my gender and my (apparent) age. I was 34 when I conducted these interviews but have always looked younger. This was in fact something Darnel commented on directly, asking how old I was at the end of the interview. He seemed unable to reconcile me being the same age as his mother, and commented on my “young type of personality”. These two factors, combined with my efforts to appear friendly and informal, seemed to give these young men leave to temporarily reposition themselves as the lead role in our communications. It seems unlikely that these interviews would have played out in the same way, and perhaps even addressed the same topics, if I had been an older male.

6.6.3 Subversive power play: Manipulating femininity

Such gendering was not, however, one-sided. I too played out my own gender stereotypes. In several of the interviews, this was demonstrated in my adoption of motherly/sisterly roles. In my interviews with Jamal, Keenan and Scott for example, I continually found myself encouraging their story-telling through providing a sympathetic sounding-board. I quickly picked up their positive response to my empathetic tone, and worked more in to our interactions to as to encourage similar and further story-telling. With others though, my engagement with my female identity was a way to neutralise and protect against my own discomfort. And here again it is useful to consider the interviews of Gary and Darnel.

As explored earlier in this chapter, Gary was a challenging interviewee. He was in many ways an angry person, and there were times I felt unnerved by him. When he centred on topics that tapped in to his anger, his talk became fast paced, loud and aggressive. I often had to double my efforts to process and respond to the things he was saying. I suspected that any failure to do so would have led to him completely shut down on me. To facilitate this, I very deliberately promoted a more feminine, ‘softer’ identity. Rather than act purely as ‘researcher’, an authority figure Gary seemed prone to becoming angered by, I

promoted another aspect to my identity; a less-threatening, more feminine self. Gailey & Prohaska (2011, p.367), in their research into power and gender negotiations during interviews with men (as women), reported relinquishing control during their interviews to ensure the men would talk with them. They discuss the technique making them feel "extremely vulnerable and sometimes threatened by the interviewees" (ibid). Though this was not my own experience, in fact this had the opposite effect in my case, the changing up of one's natural self because of a sense of need within the context of the interview certainly was apparent. Indeed, such behaviour was exhibited in my use of humour, self-deprecation and the frequent returning to 'safe' topics - for example, Gary's interest in food. Indeed, Gary's cookery narrative was very much a product of the topics I felt more comfortable engaging with. I employed similar 'techniques of femininity' in my interview with Darnel. I often played up a lack of knowledge in certain areas to encourage him to fill in the gaps, for example, in not understanding certain drug terminologies or showing a lack of awareness of how a prison ran. As with Gary, I often found myself promoting my identity as 'girl' rather than 'researcher' suspecting he responded more favourably to the former.

6.7 Race, class and gender: Exploring narratives through an intersectional lens

The second half of this chapter has explored how aspects of identity (gender, age, class) and the interplay between different identities (theirs and mine) might explain the way the young men's narratives were shaped. Within this, intersecting aspects of identity have been considered for their possible effects too, for example gender and class, and gender and age. However, social identities are complex and vast, and extend beyond singular and binary explanations. They are also not exempt from the world in which they are formed; they are the products of power brought about by certain structural conditions and social experiences. Importantly, it is in these certain structural conditions that we might learn about how *life-world* narratives are negotiated. To discuss this further, it is useful to draw on intersectional theory.

Crenshaw (1989) introduced the term intersectionality into critical theory to describe the ways black women are oppressed by social structures which place them in terms of their gender *or* their ethnicity, but almost never as both. Intersectionality, as a theoretical

concept, considers how all aspects of an individuals social and political identities (gender, race, class, sexuality, disability, etc) intersect and reinforce one another. An intersectional perspective provides an important framework for exploring the social world. It acknowledges how particular forms of oppression (race, gender, class, etc) are not necessarily experienced separately but rather intersect in everyday life (Collins, 1993; Windsong, 2018). Such an approach recognises how interlocking identities are defined in terms of relative sociocultural power and privilege, and accordingly how they might shape individual and collective experiences (Parent, DeBlaere & Moradi, 2013, p.640). Relevant here, intersectional theory also considers the processes involved in understanding privileges and inequalities, and as such promotes an investment in seeing things from the perspective of 'the other'.

I and the young men in this research had little in common with each other in terms of demographics. We were separated by gender, age, class, education, employment, and probably personal finances and economic stability. For four (Keenan, Jon, Jamal and Darnel), we were also separated by race. Though these differences are not necessarily problematic in the research process, bypassing them, especially in research which seeks to explore the life-worlds of others, is shortsighted at best. Agyeman (2008, p.78), in her research exploring the lived experiences of second-generation young black women in predominantly white community and school settings, talks of the challenges of white researchers exploring black lives. For example, she notes the issues of researchers who are not part of the life-worlds of others yet who want to be credible in their representations of them. She makes particular reference to the problem of '"white dominant discourses" in the interpretation of the lives of others which, she argues, contribute to the marginalisation of under-represented groups e.g. the trope of black pupils and educational underachievement. Being white itself, she contends, represents being part of the dominant discourse. Instead, Ageyman promotes a reflexive approach which forces the researcher's positionally in to focus. As she importantly comments:

> *When researching the* Other *in the role of an outsider, this also means addressing the role of self in research and engaging in critical questioning of one's own role and scope. Using ethnographic methods to access the life worlds of others and enabling their voices to be heard, is one way of trying to address the issue of power imbalance in the research process. The issue therefore is not whether the researcher or writer is disabled, black or female themselves but rather whether they are writing from that perspective.*
>
> (Agyeman, 2008, p.82)

Intersectional perspectives such as this offer an understanding in to how lives are communicated (within research), and in turn how they are interpreted. They also privilege the perspective of the other, a course of action essential in research seeking to redress inequities of power. To explore these matters within my own study, I will return once more to my interview with Darnel.

"Darnel" - February 2012

I felt anxious about "Darnel's" interview. I met him earlier that day and he seemed a bit unapproachable. I found him outside the café speaking to "Jon" about his later interview with me, and it wasn't all that positive. It was pretty awkward when he realised who I was. He then arrived late for our actual meeting but wasn't unapologetic like Jon had been. I wasn't sure if it was because he was simply unaware of his lateness or was *aware but did not feel the need to account for it. However, combined with my earlier meeting of him I went in to the interview a little annoyed and lacking in my usual confidence. I don't know if it was apparent to Darnel. It was certainly not a positive influence in shaping my initial approach to him.*

The differences between us seemed to conspire in making rapport building more challenging. Darnel was 21, from a black-Caribbean ethnic background and he had a strong North London accent. He was dressed in dark jeans and a hoodie, a resembled the typical 'young black man' media stereotype. He was tall and well-built (muscular), and had a serious, almost guarded look about him that unnerved me. Had I met Darnel out of the 'safe' context of this research, I would likely have felt intimidated by him. My fast-paced, upbeat way of speaking stood awkwardly with his slow heavily accented talk, and I felt conscious of my educated and socially privileged background in a way I hadn't with Jon or Jamal. Even my clothing choices today, brightly coloured and obvious, felt awkward compared with Darnel's understated look. Though I often look quite different to those that I interview, with Darnel the differences felt extreme. Whether this was something that Darnel felt too I can't be sure. As a result, I ended up being exaggeratedly enthusiastic (to try make things comfortable). He seemed altogether suspicious and confused by this.

Darnel presented as awkward for much of the early part of our meeting. He looked uncomfortable and at times threatened with the unknown format of the research interview. He kept fiddling with his hands, and also spent ages playing with a pen, which he dropped four times before it became lost under the table. He then replaced the pen with his t-shirt, and started fiddling with that too - rolling it up and down again. He noticeably eased up after the recorded interview started but remained

fidgety till the end. His child-like behaviour seemed a complete mismatch with his intimidating physical presence. I thought at first Darnel was going to be a very challenging interviewee.

This is an entry from my field-notes taken shortly after my interview with Darnel in February, 2012. The excerpt is revealing both in its recapturing of my perceptions of the interview, but also reflecting where my thinking was at that point in my life. What feels clear reading this back now is how many assumptions are at play. I make judgements about Darnel's clothes (and its casting him as a typical "young black man"), his "heavily accented talk", his time-keeping, and his mannerisms. It all feels rather characteristic of the very media stereotype I seem to take issue with. Significant too is how I document his actions, firstly his attitude on meeting me, and secondly his lateness to the interview. I even comment on my 'annoyance' about it. Notably, I use Jon as an example of *how to do things properly.* Though both young men were late, Jon's decision to engage with me in pro-social niceties i.e. texting to say he was running behind, and apologising when he arrived, meant I then afforded him the 'good guy' identity. For Darnel, I do the opposite. I make an assumption about his lateness, and clearly mark it out as unacceptable. There is notable lack of consideration of the possibilities for Darnel's lateness, for example that perhaps had trouble with traffic or couldn't leave his other job early enough, or even that he was anxious about meeting me. Indeed, the nervous "child-like" behaviour he exhibits during the early part of the interview is arguably a good indicator of the latter. Significant too is how I reward the other young men for engaging in certain middle-class ways of being whilst at the same time appear to judge him for not doing the same. For example, I frequently praised Jamal, Jon and Keenan for their candid disclosures and mature ways of presenting themselves, but Darnel's failure to do so had me characterise him in my notes as "challenging" and "uncommunicative". Though I set out for these interviews to be an empowering, collaborative piece of research what strikes me now is that I meant that based on *my* understanding of what these terms meant. With this in mind, it is useful to look again at my first encounter with Darnel and this time consider it from what might have been his point of view.

Upon first meeting, Darnel too would have been acutely aware of our differences. He identified as black Caribbean and was very dark skinned. He was also young, strongly built, tall, and male. I, by contrast, will have appeared to him as small (I am only 5'2), female, and clearly an adult. Most significantly, and a point I will return to later, I also

presented as white. Now to consider the unseen differences. Darnel was there to meet someone from a university who had an academic interest in ‘the lives of young men in the criminal justice system’. There was an objectivity to my interest in him, and represented the traditional problems of power within the research interview (Nunkoosing, 2005). The educational and class differences between us would have been pretty apparent too - me at university, him not long out of prison. Also, I observe his accent as being a "strong North London” one, though inevitably he would have simultaneously registered mine as a well-spoken, southern one. Furthermore, the meeting had been made at my request, and (as explored earlier in this chapter) in a setting that further positioned him as an offender. I on the other hand was there in the role of professional. In every way, we stood as opposites.

However, though clear opposites, to Darnel we would unlikely have appeared as equals. There were stark power differentials between us and not simply due to my role as researcher. Indeed, I benefitted from my education, my job, my social mobility, and from a structural point of view, my whiteness and my social class. Where Darnel’s combined identity characteristics (i.e. his race, background, class and age) would have have placed him as “social threat” (Trawalter, Todd, Baird & Richeson, 2008; Wilson, Hugenberg & Rule, 2017), mine placed me as ‘social asset’. The structural inequalities between us were pervasive. I comment at one point in my field notes that had I met Darnel outside of the safe context of the research situation I would have felt “intimidated by him". Yet, the salient point here is that I *was* in fact in a safe space. It was Darnel who was not. Though Darnel was unfamiliar to me, other than the vague impressions of young male offenders that my previous prison-based research projects had afforded me, to him I would likely have been all too familiar. As a middle-class, 30 something, white woman, I would likely have represented a huge chunk of his (possibly quite negative) experience of the state - be it within the education system, the social services, or the criminal justice system. Given all this, Darnel’s obvious uncertainty of me, his initial awkwardness and his anxious mannerisms (fiddling, not forming eye-contact), seem considerably more understandable.

Read this way, Darnel’s ultimate changing of the social space between us, his refusal of the second drawing task, and his restructuring of our roles to reconfigure himself at the very least as equal to me, might alternatively be understood as a process of resilience and fortitude. Indeed, that I found things demonstrably easier at the end of our interview, that I genuinely enjoyed our relaxed stroll back to the YAO offices and the friendly conversation that accompanied it, seems now much less to do with me and considerably more to do

with him. It was Darnel who found his confidence. It was Darnel who found a way to assert himself against my 'authoritative whiteness'. And most notably, it was Darnel who found a way to assimilate all those differences between us and make the space between us safe. Like so many young people I have interviewed in the past who have been structurally disadvantaged by the systems and processes of the middle-classes, Darnel's strength of character was remarkable.

6.8 An alternative view

This chapter has outlined what a reflexive position might offer in terms of a deeper and more nuanced analysis. However, it is important to acknowledge another view here. Such intense reflexivity can also be criticised for being somewhat self-obsessed. Rather than the focus being on exploring the narrated lives of others, there is risk for the researcher in making it, "all about me". As Crewe (2014, p.401) argues, researchers doing fieldwork should remember that they are "the least important person there" (Crewe, 2014, p. 401). The job of the researcher is to find about about the other, not forefront the self. Even more pertinently, there is research which questions whether there is a need for a reflexive position at all. For example, Damsa & Ugelvik (2017), in a paper based on their individual research into inmates' experiences of being imprisoned in Kongsvinger prison in Norway, found little difference in what prisoners were reporting during interviews, despite the researchers' obvious differences. Though the younger and female Damsa, was "consistently confused" to be in a marginal, supportive role, (e.g. secretary, translator, student), with prisoners frequently making eye contact with Ugelvik, (even though most of the conversation took place in a language he did not speak), their research findings turned out to be very much the same. As they state,

> *We can only conclude that the differences between our two field positions at the intersection of citizenship, age, and gender mattered little for our two projects. They were not differences that really made a difference.*
>
> (Damsa & Ugelvik 2017, p.9)

However, though Damsa & Ugelvik make an important point here, the reflexive analysis described in this chapter does not lose its value in offering a possible reading of what the impact might be of the researcher's presence. I have no doubt that another (perhaps older,

black and male) researcher may have found similar themes in the narratives of these young men, but I contend that they would likely have been communicated in different ways, or some topics emphasised more than others. Indeed, I would take the gamble that if these young men had been interviewed by a male researcher who had also spent time in prison, then such stories of masculinities and ways of being in prison would not have been quite so generously explained. Or perhaps, a more advanced discussion might have taken place.

Conclusion

As this second analysis chapter has argued, the impact of the social, (i.e. the researcher and the research situation), on the narratives of the young men seemed highly apparent. First and foremost, it was seen in how the narratives were built within a clear criminal framework. Though I very deliberately left the choices of topic to them, all talked of their criminal past, with most structuring criminality as a central feature of their narrative. Whilst this might have been expected given I was in contact with them *because* of their criminal status, the physical environment remained relevant. Indeed, all the interviews were located within the affiliated places and spaces of the CJS, which again, the young men were occupying as a result of their criminal past. Also, as a researcher, I carried with me the signifiers of authority (e.g. identity badges, panic alarms and ethical approval documentation). It is likely that these combined factors placed me as 'one of them', and as such impacted on what they chose to talk about, and how they chose to talk about it.

The mechanics of the interview also played their part. For example, the digital recorder seemed to exacerbate a sense of unease, marking me out again as a potential authority figure; its presence, a risk to potential incrimination. The drawing task too added to this effect. As described in chapter 3, the task heightened power differentials between us, with several of the young men appearing visibly uncomfortable with it, and one outright rejecting it. Institutional associations also were at play in the way that some interpreted the task as a psychological assessment tool (incidentally, an effect also observed in the pilot study).

Notable too was my implied role of counsellor. Several seemed to utilise the interview as a therapeutic session, with a number of narratives centred on stories of self-harm, mental health and childhood trauma. Of note, the taking up of the therapist role was also something I found myself to be complicit in, often acting to type through the use of therapeutic phraseology and counsellor behaviours (i.e. listening, empathising and encouraging self-disclosure). In addition, the impact of my own professional history was key in the ways I seemed to find understanding and empathy in the young men's criminality, and in the case of one, reasons to excuse it.

Perhaps most significant though, was the apparent impact of the demographic differences between us. Indeed, the young men tended towards to the use of gendered and age-specific language, and acted in ways which placed our gender differences at the forefront e.g. mild flirtation, posturing, and the invocation of hegemonic masculinities Interestingly, this hew to gender roles also created problems for the young men, especially those invested in preserving 'good guy' identities. Disclose of harms committed appeared more difficult to communicate when factoring in my status as a woman. I again note my own complicity here in conforming to stereotypical gender roles e.g. using softer, gentler language, and drawing on humour and self-deprecation to make myself seem 'safer'. It is possible then that in performing 'woman', the young men took certain narrative routes in order to respond to what they felt was expected. However, though a lot can be drawn from the analysis of singular or binary demographic differences, this overlooks the particular ways that multiple intersections of our identities operate. And, in turn, how those identities are shaped by structural privilege and structural inequalities. Through revisiting my data collection field notes of one particular interview, new consideration was given to what impact the complex intersecting aspects of identity might have had on the interview situation, and by extension the interview product.

This second analysis chapter has considered what a reflexive position might offer in terms of thinking about how the young men's narrative's may have been shaped by the social world in which they were produced. It has offered possible reasons for the young men's investments in certain stories, and moreover, why these particular stories might have been told in the way they were. However, it is now important to think about how the learning from chapters 5 and 6 might be usefully understood in terms of their contributions to both the tradition of narrative criminology, *and* to the implications for practice for criminal justice

services and other YAO agencies. The last chapter, therefore, places these findings in a theoretical and applied context.

7.0 Discussion and Conclusions

This final chapter considers the implications from the analysis, both in its contribution to the field of narrative criminology, and in what it might provide by way of learning for YAO services, and YAO focused policy and practice. This chapter begins by revisiting the research problem set out in chapter 1, and subsequently the aims and objectives of the thesis. It then moves on to summarise the key findings from the analysis conducted in chapters 5 and 6, highlighting the most significant points and how they relate to the aims of the research. An account is then made of how these findings might be useful to the existing knowledge base, when it comes to the construction of the YAO in criminal justice policy and practice. This chapter, and by extension this thesis, concludes by considering where this research might be taken in future.

7.1 The research problem, and the aims and objectives of the research

In chapter one, it was argued that the institutionalisation of young adulthood in criminal justice policy and practice carries certain risks. Firstly, in its potential to impact on the way that young adults might see themselves. Indeed, as the warning from Maruna, Porter & Carvalho (2004, p.228) which opened this thesis suggested, the perceived social, psychological and moral deficits of offenders which dominate the 'risk' and 'needs' discourses of probation may "become a reified and internalized aspect of the probation client's self-identity". In short, institutional understandings about the nature and needs of (young adult) offenders might end up being absorbed by the YAO themselves, and moreover, acted upon because of it. And secondly, on the other side of the coin, that the YAO services subsequently set up to meet those 'needs' might in turn run the risk of marginalising and alienating young adults who do *not* recognise themselves in those institutional explanations i.e. "I am not what they say I am". A finding noted in many studies exploring similar effects in a range of correctional therapeutic contexts (Anderson & Sandberg, 2017; Fox, 1999; Järvinen and Andersen, 2009; Waldram, 2007). Though the drive towards service user involvement in service development and delivery has gone someway to address these issues, it has been argued that such representation is open to manipulation, albeit for good intentions (e.g. so that support for YAO continues to be

available). As such, it was suggested that there might be better ways of getting knowledge about the lives of YAO that, 1) does not forefront the interests or agendas of YAO services, or wider YAO-focussed policy and, 2) allows YAO the freedom with which to speak about their lives in ways that are, arguably, more meaningful and more natural to them.

7.1.1 The aims and questions of the research

This research aimed to do two things. Firstly, to explore the narratives of young adult men[26] in the CJS, seeking to understand their construction as a product of the social world from which they had been drawn. Secondly, to consider how those narratives laid the foundations for future action. This was argued as being of crucial importance for any organisations, programmes or services who have the desistance of YAO as their goal (or one of them). The research questions, therefore, were concerned with exploring, 1) what narratives and narrative identities the young men drew on in explaining and making sense of their lives, 2) how those narratives were shaped by the social world from which they were drawn, 3) what those narratives might reveal about the young men's intentions to future action and, 4) what subsequent learning might be available for those working with (and writing policy about) young adults in the CJS.

The analysis described in chapters 5 and 6 not only fully met the aims of this research in allowing for a rich and in-depth exploration into the narrated lives of YAO, but also demonstrated the immense value of a narrative approach in offering causal explanations i.e. how the young men suggested their intention towards particular courses of action through those narratives. A detailed exploration of this is presented in the following section.

7.2 Key findings from the research: A thematic narrative analysis

In considering how the aims of this thesis have been met, a review of the key points from the analysis is useful. This first section will explore the main themes found in the young men's narratives, as described in chapter 5. These are presented through an exploration of

[26] An explanation as to why the focus of this thesis is specifically on young adult men rather than all young adult offenders is found in chapter 3.

1) how narrative identities were constructed, 2) how the social world affected those constructions, and 3) how those narrative identities suggested future action.

7.2.1 Narratives, narrative identities and routes to future action

As noted in chapter 2, narratives are inextricably tied up with how we produce a concept of self (Bruner, 2003; Copes, 2016). And so it was in this research. In telling stories about their lives, the young men constructed their narrative identities. Following the observations of Adler et al. (2017), this was done by weaving together their past, present and importantly their imagined future. Explaining lives was (for most) an exercise in explaining a past life of crime, and then laying out detailed blueprints which set out plans to desist from crime. Recalling Maruna's words, the desisting offender has much to explain (2001, p.85). A large part of the young men's narrative commitment then, was in constructing pro-social identities to support this narrative. These were found in many forms.

Rehabilitated identities: Pursuing pathways towards desistance was closely aligned with narrative constructions of rehabilitation. To ensure a rehabilitated identity could therefore be both claimed *and* approved (the process, of course, not just in being able to decide for oneself, but having that recognised by important and authoritative others), (as also noted in Maruna, 2001, and Victor & Waldram, 2015), certain courses of action were demanded. For example, in the case of Kyle, his refusal to relinquish blame for his childhood to his mother, or indeed anyone else, allowed him to take full responsibility for his later criminal behaviour. Given that taking personal responsibility is seen by the CJS as the cornerstone to successful rehabilitation, it seems likely that Kyle's particular investment in eschewing narratives of blame was tied up in being able to successfully progress through the system. By taking full responsibility, Kyle was able to claim a rehabilitated identity, *and* have it certified by important, institutionally powerful others.

Claiming moral identities: Reflecting directly the knowledge produced through Maruna's redemption scripts (2001), claiming pro-social identities was also about (re)claiming morality. Jamal's narrative of the prodigal son saw him turn from his family and his religion to crime and substance addiction, and then back to *the good path* after finding redemption in prison. By suggesting that his behaviour was the product of bad friends and an addictive personality, he was able to keep his inner morality, a fundamental characteristic of his "real

me", in tact. And with Keenan, through placing his "past mistakes" as a cautionary tale, something which might prevent others from doing the same, he was able to take a moral position. His criminal past became an important function of his future purpose as moral guardian.

Pro-social identities are adult identities: Particularly relevant to this research in its concerns with the conditions of 'young adulthood', *and* reflecting the age and crime literature base, (e.g. Farrington, 1986; Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1963; Moffitt, 1993; Sampson & Laub, 2005), pro-social identities were also constructed through explanations of maturing out of youthful deviance. Desisting from crime, as Maruna (2001) observed in his own research, was seen as part and parcel of developmental maturity. For young men such as Jamal, and even more so Gary, being accepted as an adult was integral to how they saw their lives moving forward. As such, discourses of maturity and adulthood often went hand in hand with the young men's intentions to separate from their previous friendship groups. Echoing the findings of Miller, Carbone-Lopez & Gunderman (2015), certain relationships were constructed as criminogenic. For the young men most vocal about their desistance, the commitment to their future crime-free selves saw them severing connections with their social past (e.g. Darnel, Kyle, Jamal, Jon). Interestingly, those that saw distancing themselves from certain friendships as beyond their abilities were also those that considered their future criminality as inevitable. This was particularly the case with Ben. Indeed, Ben's continued links to his childhood friends meant he was unable to secure a pro-social, non-offender identity, and by extension, an adult identity.

'*Knifing off' anti-social identities:* Being accepted as reformed, rehabilitated and pro-social also meant the young men had to distance themselves from being known as 'criminal'. This was especially important for those most invested in forging pathways towards desistance. Again, Kyle is a good example. Though several of the young men appeared to place value on their criminal notoriety (e.g. Tom, Scott and Craig), advancing stories of bravado and triumph in physical displays of masculinity, Kyle was uninterested in promoting that part of himself. Given he was convicted of the most serious offence of all the young men, *and* had spent the longest time in prison, should he have wanted to brag about his notoriety, he definitely would have had the means with which to do so. Instead, his investment was in removing himself from anything that tied him to that way of being seen, an effect again found in Miller, Carbone-Lopez & Gunderman (2015). Morevover, this need to 'knife off' the bad was also seen in Jamal. In seeking to reconnect with his

“real me”, a young man from a “good Asian family" who had every opportunity, he worked hard to distance himself from *immoral* others (Copes, 2016, and Ugelvik, 2015).

Narratives were also told about the ways in which the structures and systems of society impacted on the lives of the young men. As explored in chapter 1, certain state sanctioned programmes and interventions have been found to inhibit, marginalise and alienate individuals who do not conform to that which is institutionally understood of them (e.g. Anderson & Sandberg, 2017; Fox, 1999; Järvinen and Andersen, 2009; Waldram, 2007). These explanations of the alienating power of the state (and its agents) were also found in this research. In particular, in its authority to endow and deny legitimate identities

Gary, in particular, was angered by Probation in refusing to see him through the same rehabilitated lens that he saw himself. His continued discourses of maturity and adulthood seemed to reflect his wider frustration of not being trusted as having legitimately ‘gone straight’. This was also the case for Jamal, but in terms of his moral identity. Though he had been able to reclaim his moral self through the eyes of his family, his girlfriend and the YAO service, Probation (in the case of one particular officer) continued to place him as deviant, and as such morally deficient. It is perhaps why he denies the word rehabilitated in his narrative, given that the word is imbued with the power of the state. Craig too described suffering through state definitions of his identity. Though in his understanding he was not violent per se, just someone who stood up for himself and was "one of the lads”, institutional constructions of violent offenders meant that he was denied a reformed identity. This, in turn, had serious repercussions, in that he was subsequently denied access to his child. Finally, there was Ben. Though he acquiesced to state sanctioned mental health assessments of his own anger issues, thereby conforming to the greater institutional power of the psy-disciplines, he was deeply frustrated by being forced to accept institutional conclusions as to the reason for it. Most frustratingly for Ben, as accessing mental health services was a condition of his court order, he had no choice but to comply.

Finally, desistance was not always found to align with institutional understandings of how 'good, reformed offenders' should be. There was often nuance in how the young men explained it. Significantly, aspirations of desistance were sometimes at odds with the ways in which the young men understood the world, and by extension how they felt they should and could act *because* of that.

Desistance isn't always about claiming pro-social or moral selves: Going straight wasn't necessarily about redemption and becoming moral. Jon's motivation to desist, for example, was not simply because of wanting to turn his life around, or discovering 'through the hard way' that crime doesn't pay. Rather, his narrative suggested that legitimate ways of being might bring the returns that illegitimate ways of being had denied. Indeed, Jon's motivation to desist was not caught up with finding routes out of crime, per se, but finding more efficient ways of making and keeping money, such that he could get to where he wanted to go (i.e. to a nice, big, expensive house). Research and policy often talks about the value for YAO in securing meaningful employment, however there are assumptions about what is meant by meaningful. Typically, it is that the individual is fulfilled and has a sense of useful purpose in the world. For Jon however, and to an extent Darnel, meaningful employment meant getting a job that earned lots of money, in order to achieve a better, more comfortable life.

Desistance versus habitus: In discussing discourses of protection, some of the young men stated certain intentions to commit future harms. This was particularly notable in Scott's narrative. As explored in chapter 5, Scott's claims to want to bring harm to other men were framed in stories of protecting the important women in his life e.g. his sister and his mother. In setting out how he would have violently attacked an unsuitable former boyfriend of his sister's, he simultaneously implies an intended course of action towards his mother's current partner. Moreover, Scott's understanding of the role that men perform in relation to women was supported by other men in his life. The protection of women through violence was constructed as not only acceptable but the norm. This is an important finding in terms of understanding that, even for the desisting offender, a wider moral code rooted in an individual's habitus, might still move that person towards particular courses of criminal action. This conflict was also noted in a story told by Jamal. Though he resisted a prison identity, given its lack of fit with his habitus as middle-class Muslim boy from a good Asian family, and his pro-social identity as a law-abiding citizen, Jamal indicates willingness to act in certain, hyper-masculine ways (including the acceptance of violence) in order to fit with the prison environment. Acting outside of his nature in this way suggests that, again, even non-violent young men might choose certain paths if the situation demands it. Indeed, for some violent action might be the product of external expectations (the demands of the environment), rather than internal inclinations ("what I actually would do").

7.3 Key findings from the research: A reflexive analysis

In the following section, the key points from chapter 6 are revisited. In doing so, it addresses the third research question in understanding the impact of the social world on the narrative product. This section will be presented by addressing how the young men's narratives were impacted by 1) the research situation, 2) the mechanics of the interview (e.g. the tools of data collection), and 3) the researcher.

The role of environment: Reflecting the findings of others when it came to the shaping power of the data collection environment (Herzog, 2005; Presser, 2005), conducting the research interviews in the affiliated places and spaces of the CJS seemed to have a significant impact in what the young men talked about. Indeed, though the interview format was unstructured, and followed no particular agenda, all discussed their criminal past, with most structuring criminality as a central feature of their narrative. Though fully aware their status as "young adult offenders" was the reason for their inclusion in the study, and as such, likely provoking assumptions about what I was looking for in terms of narrative themes, the impact of the YAO setting seemed to underline this as a *particularly* important topic. Moreover, in line with Presser's (2005) thoughts on the problems of power differentials in conducting interviews with offenders, carrying with me the signifiers of authority, (e.g. identity badges, panic alarms and ethical approval documentation), no doubt added to the effect of placing me as 'one of them'. This seemed to be confirmed in the case of Scott, who talked almost entirely from his status as 'offender', and Gary, who (reflecting his intense dislike of the CJS) not only brokered the most amount of resistance towards me, but also very explicitly labelled me as 'Probation'.

The mechanics of the interview: The tools used as part of the data collection process also played their part. Firstly, with regard to the digital recorder. Echoing the findings of others in the field (e.g. Jacobs, 1999; Sandberg & Copes, 2012 & Williams, 1989), the recorder seemed to provoke feelings of anxiety and mistrust, certainly in some. This was a clear issue for Craig, whose narrative was notably less restrained when the recorder was off, and Gary, who questioned me vociferously about its necessity and usage. (Though, as it transpired, purely because of his suspicions of subterfuge and entrapment). In addition, the drawing task too added to this effect. Whilst some connected quickly and easily to the task, for others it appeared to heighten negative power differentials between us (e.g. in the

cases of Gary, Kyle and Craig). Galman's (2009) points around the potentially infantilising nature of graphic elicitation are relevant here, particularly in relation to Gary. Invested as he was in an adult identity, and frustrated by its denial by the systems and structures which contained him, the child-like nature of the task must have have seemed to him at best frivolous, and at worst, a threat. His refusal to participate was thus entirely understandable. Such findings underline the importance of considering what even the tools of research might suggest to research participants. Indeed, though perhaps perceived as innovative and necessary to the researcher, they might well be seen as threatening and risky to the participant.

The impact of the researcher: This final area was where the most significant impact was felt. The young men's narrative choices seemed to be, at least in part, a response to who they understood me to be. One notable example was in how the group responded to me as counsellor or therapist. Reflecting the experiences of Garfield, Reavey & Kotecha (2010) and Hollway & Jefferson (2000) in using similar methods, the more intimate structure of the biographical narrative interview seemed to engender a substitutionary "therapeutic space", something which, in turn, resulted in a wealth of narratives centred on self-harm, mental health and childhood trauma. Significant too was the impact of our demographic differences, particularly age and gender. This played out in the young men's use of gender and age-specific language, and acting in ways which foregrounded (and to an extent sexualised) our gender differences e.g. flirtation, physical posturing (taking up space; drawing attention to their physical body), and drawing on traditionally masculine discourses (e.g. the hardships of being 'inside', histories of fighting and violence, and disciplined physical training). In some instances, the young men sought to use these gender differentials as a means with which to challenge my implied authority. In line with observations made by Presser (2005, p.2086) in her own research with male offenders, I was sometimes made to feel as if I were stepping "out of place". This was particularly the case with Kyle and Gary, both of whom exerted hegemonic masculinities, and by doing so, made very clear the boundaries between us.

However, though a lot can be drawn from the analysis of singular or binary demographic differences, this overlooks the particular ways that multiple intersections of our identities operate. Drawing on Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality, new insights were made into the possible ways of conceptualising these research encounters, in a way that considered not just my own perspective but theirs too. Indeed, in a world where I, as a

white, older, university educated, middle-class, professional woman enters a research situation and expects, through social niceties and a friendly face, the full disclosure of the life of a young, black, working-class, male 'offender', is an exercise in privilege. And, moreover, one which demonstrates a particular lack of understanding. By exploring the lives of others from a place that recognises the role of structural power and structural inequalities within a given dynamic, we might be in a much better position to understand an individual's particular investments in, and resistances to, portraying themselves in this way or that.

Though such effects of the social might simply be coincidence, or a product of over analysis, it is highly unlikely that these factors had *no* impact at all. Indeed, the myth of the impartial researcher, or the unaffected participant are long past. Though, acknowledging the important points made by Damsa & Ugelvik (2017), similar narratives might well have been told to another researcher, for example, an older, black, male, it seems unlikely that they would have been told in the exact same way, or that certain topics would be given the same level of depth and detail. Indeed, though we might all have a particular story to tell, who we are telling it to and where we are telling it, will likely factor heavily into our narrative decisions.

7.4 Implications for YAO services and the wider criminal justice system

Though the previous analysis in its value as a contribution to the field of narrative criminology is clear, it is important to consider what learning might be taken from this in terms of its use to YAO services, and relatedly to the further development of YAO focussed criminal justice policy. The following section, in answering the final research question, therefore places these findings in an applied context.

7.4.1 What research and policy says about YAO, and what they say about themselves

As was noted in the introduction to this thesis, and more thoroughly explained in chapter 1, YAO are placed as a group with a certain set of typicalities. In addition to the host of social and psychological problems as outlined by the former Chief Inspection of Probation (HMIP,

2019, p.6) (e.g. coming from abusive or neglectful families, growing up in care, experiencing anger and impulsivity problems, low or no qualifications, problems with substance misuse and related issues with mental health), this group have also been argued as having a range of additional age-specific problems. These have been suggested as resulting in even more damaging outcomes for YAO in contrast to their older peers. For example, YAO are said to have greater problems with employment (T2A, 2009; 2012; Williams, 2015), education (Chater, 2009; T2A, 2009; 2012; Williams, 2015) and housing (Williams, 2015). They are argued as being more prone to alcohol abuse than younger or older offenders (T2A, 2009), with higher rates of suicide and self-harm (T2A, 2009; 2012). On a socio-economic level, they are likely to have been in the care system (T2A, 2009), grown up amidst poverty and social exclusion (Chater, 2009), and experienced family breakdown (Chater, 2009). Most significantly, YAO are argued as having age-specific issues often related to their maturity, which culminates in problems of impulsivity and emotion management (National Offender Management Service, 2015). This has in turn been suggested as a particular risk factor for reoffending, with calls for assessing psychosocial maturity, and developmentally appropriate interventions designed to encourage desistance (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2016; 2018). However, to what extent do these institutional understandings fit with what YAO say about themselves?

Though some of the socio-economic conditions outlined in the literature were present in the young men's explanations of their lives, they did not advance these as reasons for their offending. That is not to say these weren't motivational factors, but the distinction is this was not something the young men drew on themselves. For example, though Jon experienced frustration with his current living situation, he did not cite economic disadvantage as the reason for his offending. Instead, his motivations were constructed as wanting to have money so he could have nice things. In addition, Keenan explains his offending as the result of a strict and authoritative (and therefore highly present) parent, rather than an absent mother or the breakdown of a family. Moreover, a number of the young men would likely not recognise themselves in the literature at all, e.g. Jamal. Though Jamal had a fairly comprehensive history of juvenile offending and substance addiction, he experienced none of the typical conditions of 'offender histories'. Indeed, it was quite the opposite. Most importantly though, the young men's narratives outright rejected institutional understandings which placed them as immature, poor-decision makers or impulsive. Indeed, these were illustrated in the following ways:

Rejecting discourses of immaturity: Rather than being particularly vulnerable because of their age, the young men placed their age as an advantage. They saw themselves as older, wiser and more able to act in adult ways *because* of all they had been through. Indeed their "undesirable… fast-track" transitions to adulthood (SEU, 2005) were instead constructed as formative, enabling them to better cope with the adult world (e.g. Gary and independent living; Keenan in his role as moral guardian to his brother).

Rejecting discourses of poor-decision making: The young men's narratives were continually framed through stories of their agency. This was particularly felt when it came to desistance, both in relation to resisting the temptation of crime and the lure of substance misuse. Moreover, many of the young men also spoke of their recognition that certain social conditions might make them more predisposed to crime, and subsequently the actions they took in addressing that risk. For example, through distancing themselves from criminogenic social circles, pursuing legitimate employment pathways, and moving towards drug and alcohol free futures. Though these things were supported by, for example, external agencies, the choice to do so was very much framed as coming from within.

Rejecting discourses of impulsivity and emotion management: Finally for a number of the young men, their reasons for certain, particularly criminal actions, were not presented as being the result of impulsive action, but of a belief about how things should be done. For example, in the young men's narratives of protection. This was often part of who they were and how they understood the world, and therefore their violent reaction was not seen as examples of a lack of self-control, but of the instinctive actions explainable by their habitus.

7.4.2 Acknowledging the impact of the social world

The findings described in section 7.3 (and chapter 6) are significant in their application. Though this thesis has focussed on my experiences as 'researcher', the findings are relevant and translatable to frontline practice. And here, we might consider specifically the role of probation staff and other third sector professionals working with YAO.

As practitioners, we can never be truly impartial. We bring with us our experiences and beliefs about the world, and these, quite naturally, impact on how we work. This can be for

the good, in the rewards that hard-learnt skills and knowledge can bring to successfully managing/mentoring the lives of others, and for the less good, in the ways that we can only ever work from the point of what we know and believe about the world. Indeed, the realities of unconscious bias in probation practice, for example, is a very current area of concern (Ellis Devitt, 2018; 2019; Crozier; 2019). Moreover, we cannot expect impartiality from those we work with. We are seen, we are judged, and we are responded to because of who we are perceived to be. As the findings from chapter 6 have suggested, the impact of 'other' can be highly shaping in how one might chose to present 'self'. For professionals working directly with YAO, it is important to keep this in mind, especially if we are to better understand what it is that motivates this group to present in the way they do. And it is not just individuals, there is also the role of environment. Though it may not always be possible to alter or adapt the places and spaces in which we work with others (in the case of probation staff, this flexibility is limited entirely), we can acknowledge its impact. Indeed, as this research has argued, institutional environments can provoke institutional narratives. By being more aware of this, criminal justice practitioners might be less concerned with the pursuit of 'truth', and more concerned with trying to unpack why it is that a young adult is telling *that* story, in *that* way, at *that* particular time.

7.4.3 How might this knowledge be useful?

There are a number of ways in which these findings might be useful, not only for the services set up to support and guide YAO, but also for research and policy focussed on shaping and improving the experiences of YAO as they navigate through the system. These points are as follows:

1. *Recognising that 18-24 year olds in the CJS might be trapped into conforming to institutional understandings of the conditions of young adulthood in order to receive help and support.* YAO services are built on the principles of age-specific vulnerabilities. Though this is not to suggest that YAO do not benefit (even significantly so) from such targeted interventions, it is important for criminal justice practitioners, and voluntary and community sector professionals to be aware that the uptake of such services (compulsory or otherwise) might carry certain implications for young adults

e.g. in how they end up seeing themselves, or in how they might in turn respond to those institutional understandings.

2. *Related to above, that understanding YAO as having particular 'needs' and 'risks' will influence how professionals work with this group.* It is not just about how the young adults themselves respond to institutional explanations of young adulthood, but how professionals shape their practice because of those beliefs. Moreover, by assuming knowledge about the nature and needs of YAO, there is scope to unintentionally marginalise, alienate, or simply just miss something relevant when it comes to understanding particular motivations to engage in and desist from criminal action.

3. *Acknowledging that certain services and systems might be perceived by YAO as blockers to particular courses of action, and as such be actively resisted.* YAO who do not fully understand the purpose of particular services, or the actions that those services might have to take as part of their role, might see significant push back. Though the examples found in this research were related to the Probation Service and not YAO services per se, the knowledge is translatable.

4. *That age is not seen by YAO in the same disadvantageous way as it is by the services and systems of the CJS.* There is a risk in infantilising young adults who, through the often significantly formative experiences of their life, see their young adulthood as an important marker of their independence, competence and capability. Denying the status of (emerging) adulthood contains demonstrable possibilities for resistance.

5. *Pathways to desistance might be pursued for unconventional reasons, or as a product of a YAO's particular identity.* Desistance is a highly individualised process and as such may produce unique reasons *for* desisting, and unique ways *of* desisting. Professionals working with YAO should be mindful of this, as it might not reflect their own understandings of what desistance looks like.

6. *Desistance, as understood by the CJS, may be compromised by the ways in which YAO understand the world and therefore intend to act upon it.* Though there may be genuine aspirations to desist from crime, YAO may still act in certain anti-social or criminal ways because it is embedded within their habitus to do so.

7. *The context in which a meeting, interview or mentoring session takes place can have a significant impact on what a YAO might say, or how they might say it.* Institutional settings can provoke institutional ways of being. Though YAO services may see themselves as being distinct from the wider CJS, for the service users they still represent the conditions and structures of a society which places them as anti-social/ criminal. As such, YAO may be more or less likely to talk and act in certain ways because of that.

8. *Key workers/probation officers bring with them their own experiences and understandings of the world, and this may affect how they work with different YAO.* Though the intentions may be good, assumptions and biases about what good, and desistance focussed young adults look like might negatively affect a YAO's experience of a service. Though there has been an increasing focus on addressing internal bias within probation practice over recent years, this awareness must continue to be placed at the forefront of all criminal justice supervisory and mentoring relationships.

7.5 Conclusions: Moving forward with research into YAO

The research described in this thesis sits within the growing field of narrative criminology. It contributes, in particular, to the literature base which explores identity as a cause for both further offending *and* desistance. Moreover, it has offered an important advance on current knowledge about the condition of young adulthood as experienced by young adults within the CJS themselves. Indeed, the latter has proved to be an area of knowledge which has been consistently overlooked within YAO focussed research, and is of absolute importance to any service or system which has the reduction of offending as its central goal.

In taking this area of research forward, and given this study's explicit focus on young men, a similar study exploring the narratives of young adult women in the CJS would be useful. Over the past few years, more research has emerged which has looked specifically at the experiences of young adult women in the CJS e.g. *Meeting the Needs of Young Adult Women in Custody*, 2016, however it is thin on the ground, and again privileges institutional understandings rather than individual explanations. Though it was beyond the framework of the research described here, (the experiences of women offenders are well documented as drawing on issues that are quite different from their male peers), the importance of exploring the gendered permutations of YAO research and policy would be a welcome addition to the knowledge base. In addition, the findings from this thesis also advocate for an approach that looks specifically at the experiences of BAME YAO, particularly young Muslim men. Indeed, there is both need and scope for research exploring the motivations for desistance in terms of a better understanding of the role that family *and* the wider religious community play in Muslim YAO's decisions to desist from crime. Finally, and from a methodological point of view, further study might also consider the role of visual methods in conducting research with YAO. As this thesis has argued, though such methods have the capacity to empower and emancipate, they also have the potential to infantilise and alienate. For a group on the very cusp of adulthood, and moreover, one which has experienced particularly disrupted transitions to adulthood, methods which hew to child-like pursuits might be considered more of a threat than an asset.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Committee Letter

Appendix B: UPR16 Form

Appendix C: Introduction Letter

Appendix D: Participant Information Sheet

Appendix E: Participant Consent Form

Appendix A: Ethics Committee Letter

Kerry Devitt

PhD Student

ICJS

Copy to Amanda Holt

REC reference number: 11/12:06

Please quote this number on all correspondence

23rd February 2012

Dear Kerry,

Full Title of Study: Institutionalizing 'young adulthood' within the Criminal justice System

Documents reviewed:

-Protocol

-Invitation letter

-Consent Form

-Participant Information Sheet

Thank you for your application for ethical review; your study was reviewed at a meeting of the Faculty REC on 16th January 2012. I am sorry for the delay in conveying the Committee's decision.

The Committee noted the high quality of your application and was content to give a favourable opinion subject to two conditions:

1. The Committee was concerned about the use of what might be your personal mobile telephone – it advises you to use a University contact number or a dedicated

mobile phone number.

2. The Committee urges you to ensure that you satisfy requirements of the Data Protection Act, seeking advice from Samantha Hill at the University, if necessary. Please ensure that use of a data pen is acceptable – storage on a University network drive might be more secure. You are also advised to store data in linked anonymised form, keeping the key linking names and numbers in a separate secure facility.

There is no need to seek any further review; the Committee will assume that you will attend to the conditions. If I can be of any further help please do contact me. I wish you every success with your research

Keenan Carpenter Chair: FHSS REC

Members present at the review

Mr Keenan Carpenter, Chair
Dr Margaret Clarke, Senior Lecturer SLAS
Dr Jane Creaton, Associate Dean (academic) Ms Sukh Hamilton, Senior Lecturer SECS
Mr Richard Hitchcock, Senior Lecturer SLAS Mr Geoff Wade, Lay Member
Dr Jane Winstone, Principal Lecturer, ICJS

Appendix B: UPR16 Form

FORM UPR16

Research Ethics Review Checklist

Please include this completed form as an appendix to your thesis (see the Postgraduate Research Student Handbook for more information

University of Portsmouth

Postgraduate Research Student (PGRS) Information		**Student ID:**	509806
PGRS Name:	Kerry Ellis Devitt		
Department:	ICJS	**First Supervisor:**	Dr Paul Smith
Start Date: (or progression date for Prof Doc students)	**September 2010**		
Study Mode and Route:	Part-time	PhD	

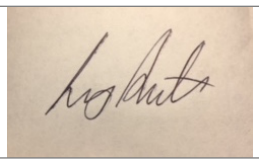
Title of Thesis:	The life-stories of young adult men in the criminal justice system: A critical narrative analysis.
Thesis Word Count: (excluding ancillary data)	81,987

If you are unsure about any of the following, please contact the local representative on your Faculty Ethics Committee for advice. Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the University's Ethics Policy and any relevant University, academic or professional guidelines in the conduct of your study

Although the Ethics Committee may have given your study a favourable opinion, the final responsibility for the ethical conduct of this work lies with the researcher(s).

UKRIO Finished Research Checklist: (If you would like to know more about the checklist, please see your Faculty or Departmental Ethics Committee rep or see the online version of the full checklist at: http://www.ukrio.org/what-we-do/code-of-practice-for-research/)	
a) Have all of your research and findings been reported accurately, honestly and within a reasonable time frame?	YES

b) Have all contributions to knowledge been acknowledged?	YES
c) Have you complied with all agreements relating to intellectual property, publication and authorship?	YES
d) Has your research data been retained in a secure and accessible form and will it remain so for the required duration?	YES
e) Does your research comply with all legal, ethical, and contractual requirements?	YES

Candidate Statement:			
I have considered the ethical dimensions of the above named research project, and have successfully obtained the necessary ethical approval(s)			
Ethical review number(s) from Faculty Ethics Committee (or from NRES/SCREC):			11/12:06
If you have *not* submitted your work for ethical review, and/or you have answered 'No' to one or more of questions a) to e), please explain below why this is so:			
Signed *(PGRS)*:			**Date:** 9.3.20

Appendix C: Introduction Letter

Study Title: 'Young Adults' and the Criminal Justice System

REC Ref No: 11/12:06

Name of Researcher: Kerry Devitt

Dear (name),

My name is Kerry Devitt and I am writing to you to invite you to take part in a research project.

I am a second year PhD student at the University of Portsmouth. I am doing a study exploring the views and experiences of 18-25 year-olds in the Criminal Justice System (CJS). I am currently trying to find people in this age-group to interview.

(*Name of key worker/probation officer*) from (*name of service*) has given you this letter as you are aged between 18 and 25 years old and you are currently in touch with an offender service. I have not been given your name, number or any contact details. This is just an introduction letter to tell you about me and my research, and to see whether you may be interested in taking part.

Interviews will be between 45 minutes and an hour, and they will involve me asking a number of questions about your life. There is nothing tricky involved. And this interview will be the only time I will need to speak to you. Everyone taking part will get a £20 "Love2Shop" voucher as a thank-you for taking part.

(*Name of key worker/probation officer*) will also have given you a two-page information sheet. This tells you in more detail about the research project and what your part in it would be. If after reading this information you think you might like to take part, you can either email me at

Kerry.Devitt@port.ac.uk or text/call me on (XXXXXX). Or you can pass on your details to (*Name of key worker/probation officer*) and I will contact you. Please also let me know a good time to reach you.

Please be assured, taking part in this research project is completely voluntary. You do not have to take part, and there will be no consequences if you don't. It is completely up to you! Plus, you can withdraw at any point leading up to the interview, and even during the interview if you change your mind half way through.

Thank-you for reading this letter and the accompanying information sheet. Please do contact me if you require any more information about the research project, or if you would like to take part.

Best wishes,
Kerry Devitt

Email: Kerry.Devitt@port.ac.uk
Tel: XXXXXX

Appendix D: Participant Information Sheet

Study Title: 'Young Adults' and the Criminal Justice System

REC Ref No: 11/12:06

Name of Researcher: Kerry Devitt

What is this all about?
In this research project, I am hoping to learn more about the lives of 18-25 year olds in the Criminal Justice System (CJS). This project has been funded by the Institute for Criminal Justice Studies at the University of Portsmouth. It is not for any financial gain. It will form part of my doctoral qualification.

Why have I been asked to take part?
I am asking you to take part because you are between 18 and 25 years old and because you have experience of the Criminal Justice System. I have asked a number of offender services to put me in touch with anyone in this age-group interested in telling me their thoughts and experiences. I am hoping to speak to around 20 people.

Do I have to take part?
Not at all. Taking part in the research is entirely voluntary, so it's all up to you!

What will taking part involve?
The process is really straightforward. If you choose to take part, just pass your number on to (add name of key worker) and (he/she) will pass it on to me. I will then text/call you and we can sort out a time and a place to meet that suits you. The actual research part will be between 45 minutes to an hour and will involve me asking you a few questions and you telling me about what you think – just like an interview. If it's OK with you, I would also like to tape record the interview so I can remember what you have said. And that's it!

Expenses and payments
As a 'thank-you' for taking part, everyone will be given a £20 "Love2Shop" voucher. Plus, if you do have any travel costs in coming to meet me I will also cover those up to £10.

Will my interview be kept confidential?
Yes! I will make sure that any identifiable details about you that may come out from your interview will be changed or made anonymous. Also, any contact/personal details I have for you (your phone number, name, address etc.) will be stored securely on my own computer. No-one has access to this but me. I will also code all your information so your name, number and address etc. cannot be linked together.

Your contact information will be kept for the duration of the research project. After that point I will erase all personal details electronically and safely dispose of any details on paper (e.g. shredding all documents). I am happy to keep your contact details on record if you are interested in reading the final report or seeing any other work to come out of the research. Your interview transcripts will be kept for at least three years after the study is complete. This is for two reasons – 1) in case the information needs to be checked by authorised people to make sure the research has been undertaken correctly and 2) in case of the need for evidence to support future (REC approved) research.

Please note: It is possible that some the transcripts of the interviews (a written record of what we have said) will be looked at by authorised people to check that I am carrying out the research correctly. It is also possible that others such as other researchers, supervisors and other authorised persons may have access to identifiable data in order to monitor the quality of research. Please be assured though that they will all have a duty of confidentiality to you as a research participant and they will do their best to meet this duty.

What will happen if I don't want to involved anymore?
You can withdraw from the research at any point leading up to the interviews or even during the interviews. After the interviews are completed though, I will be writing them all up into a report so it will be very difficult to remove you from the project at that stage. If you are really unhappy about the interview afterwards though, and you contact me within the next 24 hours after it has finished, I can still remove your information from the study.

What if there is a problem?
If you are worried about any part of the research project, you can speak to either me or my supervisor. We will both do our best to answer your questions. Our contact details are at the bottom of this information sheet. If you still aren't happy and/or wish to complain formally, you can do this by emailing/calling Dr Phil Clements, head of the Institute of Criminal Justice Studies on XXXXX.

What will happen to the results of the research project?
This research project will be written up into a long report for my university. Plus, I will be writing some papers for different academic journals. I will also write a four page summary of this research. Do let me know if you are interested in reading any of it when it is finished. Please be assured though, you will not be identified in any report/publication.

Has anyone reviewed this research project?
Yes! All research in the University of Portsmouth is looked at by independent group of people called a Research Ethics Committee. This study has been reviewed and given a favourable opinion by Keenan Carpenter of the Research Ethics Committee.

Thank-you for taking the time to read this information sheet! If you do decide to participate you will be given a copy of the information sheet to keep and a form to sign saying you are happy to take part.

Contact details:

Researcher (Me): Kerry Devitt – (Tel) XXXXX; (Email) Kerry.Devitt@port.ac.uk
My supervisor: Amanda Holt (Tel) XXXXX (Email): Amanda.Holt@port.ac.uk

Appendix E: Participant Consent Form

University of Portsmouth

Study Title: 'Young Adults' and the Criminal Justice System

REC Ref No: 11/12:06

Name of Researcher: Kerry Devitt

		Please circle one
1.	I have read the information sheet telling me about this research project:	YES / NO
2.	I have felt able to ask questions about this research project:	YES / NO
3.	(If you have asked questions) I am happy with the answers I have been given:	YES / NO
4.	I understand that I am free to withdraw from this research project at any time leading up to the interview or during the interview:	YES / NO
5.	I agree to my interview being taped using a digital voice recorder:	YES / NO
6.	Though I <u>will not</u> be personally identified, I understand *and give permission for* transcripts of my interview (a written record of what I have said) to potentially be looked at by somebody else:	YES / NO
7.	I understand how the information I give will be used:	YES / NO
8.	I agree to the information I give being retained for future (ethically approved) research :	YES / NO

Please initial the box below

I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

Name of Participant: …….

Date: ……..

Signature: ……..